EXAMINATION OF DECLINING INTIMATE PARTNER HOMICIDE RATES: A Literature Review

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Executive Summary

This literature review provides an overview of social science research that has documented the decline in spousal or intimate partner homicide and examined various explanations for this phenomenon. The key objectives of this exercise were:

1) To examine recent trends in spousal homicide in Canada to determine if this country is experiencing a long-term decline in this type of homicide or a random fluctuation;
2) To compare Canadian trends to declines in intimate partner homicide that have been documented in other countries, especially the United States;
3) To outline some of the explanations that have been offered for these declines and assess the related empirical research;
4) To suggest a future research agenda for Canadian researchers with the aim of providing a better understanding of this phenomenon in our country.

With respect to the incidence of spousal homicide in Canada, different trends have been documented. Some official statistics have reported that declines began in the early 1990s. Other researchers have suggested that spousal homicide has been declining in Canada since the early 1960s while others have noted declines began in the late 1970s. Most recently, however, the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics' annual homicide report indicated that rates of spousal homicide have remained stable in the past three years and, in fact, a slight increase was noted in the number of lethal incidents that occurred between spouses in 1999, the last year for which figures are available.

Some Canadian research has also noted that declines have been more rapid for female victims of spousal homicide than for male victims in Canada, but it is unclear at this point whether these differences are significant. This is an interesting question given that the opposite has been found in the United States: The rate at which male victims are being killed by intimate partners is decreasing at a significantly faster pace than the rate at which women are being killed by intimate partners.

Based on the above, it is important for Canadian researchers to determine, first, whether this country is, indeed, witnessing a stable declining trend or a random fluctuation in lethal violence between intimate partners and, if the former, when exactly such a decline began. Such a step is necessary if we are to identify what factors may be contributing to recent patterns. At the same time, researchers can begin to examine what may be contributing to trends in spousal homicide.

Because the declines in spousal homicide and violent crime, generally, have not been explored extensively in Canadian literature, this review produced information about possible explanations primarily relating to the United States. Extensive efforts were made, however, to apply some of the issues and explanations that were identified south of the border to the situation here in Canada. While the violent crime picture is vastly different in the United States compared to Canada, similar patterns in violent crime rates have been documented. Moreover, both countries have been witnessing similar social changes that U.S. researchers have indicated may be contributing to the perceived declines in lethal violence between spouses or intimate partners.

This paper, first, examined explanations for the general decline in violence to determine if some of these factors might contribute to an understanding of declines in spousal or intimate partner homicide. Some of the findings from this examination as they relate to Canada are highlighted below:

Gun control: Extensive changes have occurred in Canada since the late 1970s with respect to gun control legislation. Some of these changes were meant to target spousal

violence (e.g., the spousal notification line) because approximately one-third of these homicides involve the use of firearms. As a result, research should consider the role of stricter gun control legislation when examining factors that may be contributing to perceived declines in spousal homicide.

The role of incarceration: In contrast to the United States, Canada has not been experiencing an increase in their rate of imprisonment. In fact, as incarceration rates continue to increase south of the border, Canada has witnessed a decline in the rate of imprisonment. It is interesting to note, however, that official statistics show that declines in spousal homicide began at about the same time as our country's imprisonment rate peaked in the early 1990s. Thus, research should at least consider the impact of changes in levels of imprisonment on trends in spousal homicide.

Varying economic levels and homicide: Several U.S.-based studies have shown that improved economic levels have a greater impact on the incidence of family homicides, including killings that occur between spouses, than for other types of homicide. Research, then, needs to examine the role of economic factors like economic inequality, unemployment levels and poverty when explaining perceived declines in spousal homicide.

The role of demography: Some research in the United States has shown that when sex ratios are high (i.e., more men than women), the lethal victimization of females increases. While the sex ratio in this country remains about equal (1:1), each census has demonstrated that women as a group continue to increase in number. In fact, women began to outnumber men in Canada in 1976 and this gap continues to increase. Thus, demography may play a small role in the perceived declines in spousal homicide.

The civilizing process: Some researchers in the United States suggest that society is undergoing a type of civilizing process that involves a growing intolerance for interpersonal violence. The domestic violence movement is identified as one of the primary examples of this process. In other words, it is argued that the domestic violence movement has had a symbolic effect on society so that both sanctioning agencies and the general public respond with greater negativity to such crimes than in the past. Perceived declines in spousal or intimate partner homicide is thought to be a by-product of this growing intolerance for interpersonal violence.

Based on research examining general explanations for decreasing levels of violence in North American society, researchers need to, at the very least, be aware of the potential impact of these factors on declining rates of spousal homicide. Rigorous examinations of explanations that are more specific to intimate lethal violence should control for such variables.

Research on specific explanations for declines in intimate partner homicide is relatively new. It has only been within the past decade that research, primarily in the United States, has moved beyond documenting the decline in intimate partner homicide toward identifying factors that may be contributing to these patterns. The emphasis in this body of research has been on sources of exposure reduction: Factors that decrease the likelihood that violence between intimate partners will occur or continue to occur and, consequently, lead to lethal outcomes. Three important social changes have been identified in this literature: (1) the domestic violence movement; (2) increasing gender equality; and (3) the changing nature of intimate relationships. Below, is a summary of some of the findings from this research.

Gender equality: Increases in gender equality (as measured by education, occupation, employment and income levels) have been shown to increase the lethal victimization of women, at least under certain conditions. That is, as women gain social status relative to men, their vulnerability to lethal victimization may also increase. This has been found to be particularly the case for wives. However, other studies found no association between gender equality and homicide rates or, alternatively, that increasing gender equality provides protection to some women. Thus, further research needs to continue examining this relationship because findings to date, at least

with respect to research conducted in the United States, are equivocal.

Resource availability: The increased availability of domestic violence services and the existence of domestic violence legislation have played a role in reducing lethal violence between intimate partners, at least in the United States. It appears, however, that more protection has been provided to male victims compared to female victims as a result of these changes.

Changing relational lifestyles: Research has shown that falling marriage rates have reduced the opportunities for intimate partner homicide at least among married couples. This factor appears to have had a substantial impact on lethal killings between younger couples (aged 20-29). In contrast, however, it does not explain declines in killings between older couples.

While this research is relatively new, some interesting associations have been identified that offer potential explanations for the declining rate of intimate partner homicide. However, there are some limitations to this research that need to be addressed by future research:

Documenting Declines:

Use of consistent definitions: One reason for the different patterns noted for spousal homicide in Canada may be attributed to varying definitions of intimate partner relationships. Some studies use a narrow definition that includes current and former legal spouses and common-law partners and those separated and divorced from such unions. Other researchers adopt a broader definition that encompasses the above relationships, but also dating couples or lovers. Researchers need to adopt more consistent definitions and, in addition, move beyond relying on police designations of victim-offender relationships by drawing from multiple sources of information.

Disaggregating relationships: Overall trends in intimate partner homicide have been documented. However, research in the United States has shown that aggregate rates may obscure different patterns for more specific intimate partner relationships. For example, some research in the United States has shown that the lethal victimization of some unmarried females has actually increased in recent decades. Moreover, researchers need to examine rates, separately, for known high-risk relationships such as common-law partners and estranged couples. Traditionally, these relationship categories have been included in the marital category, precluding such an examination.

Broadening definitions: Because of the changing nature of intimate relationships, it is no longer suitable to examine spousal relationships only. Increasingly, other types of intimate unions are becoming more popular. Researchers need to accommodate changing relational lifestyles by adopting a broader definition of "intimate partner" that includes these other types of intimate unions such as boyfriends, girlfriends, and lovers (including same-sex relationships).

Explaining Declines:

Methodological concerns: The majority of research conducted to date is cross-sectional in nature. Thus, researchers need to move toward longitudinal designs when examining this phenomenon. Moreover, while aggregate analyses are informative, it may be that individual-level analyses will provide some insight into the mirco-dynamics of intimate relationships that would help explain declining rates of lethal violence between intimates. Finally, a number of macro level factors identified above (e.g., gun control) need to be included in analyses as control variables.

The role of subgroups: Important differences have been documented in the rate at which intimate partner homicide has declined for particular subgroups in the population. Explanations need to be able to explain these differences rather than just documenting them.

Despite these limitations, U.S.-based researchers have made important strides in understanding declines in intimate partner homicide in their country. There has been no systematic examination of these issues in Canada, thus, the future research agenda is wide open and should be two-fold:

- To continue documenting trends in spousal homicide, addressing the limitations discussed above and, in particular, documenting subgroup variation in these declines;
- To systematically examine potential factors associated with the recent patterns identified.

With respect to the latter, the Canadian research agenda should occur in two stages: (1) to empirically assess the relevance of the factors identified by U.S. research to declines witnessed in this country; and (2) to extend U.S. based research by addressing the following issues:

- The assumption that available domestic violence resources are, first, utilized and, second, uniformly accessible to various groups;
- That both successful and unsuccessful attempts are made by intimate partners to exit abusive relationships; and, related to this,
- That responses to both lethal and non-lethal violence need to be perceived as *processes* rather than isolated, single incidents.

This literature review has provided a summary of some of the social science research that has examined perceived declines in intimate partner homicide. While it may be too early for Canadians to become sanguine about the problem of intimate partner violence in our society, it is important for researchers to continue to document – in more detail – the patterns as they are occurring in this country. At the same time, we should begin to examine some of the possible explanations for this phenomenon so as to better identify what work still remains in addressing the problem of both lethal and non-lethal violence between intimate partners in Canada.

1.0 Introduction

The violent crime rate has been declining in Canada since the early 1990s (Tremblay, 2000). Similarly, the United States has experienced a remarkable decline in violent crime rates during the same period (Blumstein & Wallman, 2000; Travis, 1998). As a result, there has been a flurry of activity by researchers to firstly identify the various factors that may be contributing to this decline in violence and, secondly, to predict how long this trend might last. The primary focus of this research has been lethal violence[1] and, in particular, the subject of intimate partner homicide has received a great deal of attention. One reason for this is that substantial declines have been noted for killings that occur between spouses or intimate partners.

For example, the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics reports that spousal homicide in this country has been on the decline since the early 1990s (Fedorowycz, 2000).[2] In the United States, homicides involving intimate partners have been decreasing steadily for more than two decades (Greenfeld et al., 1998; Rennison & Welchans, 2000).[3] Official statistics in both countries also demonstrate that rates of non-lethal spousal or intimate partner violence have decreased during the past decade (CCJS, 2000; Rennison & Welchans, 2000).[4]

Traditionally, the public's fear of homicide and other serious violent crime has focused primarily on random and unpredictable violence by strangers (Ouimet & Coyle, 1991; Riedel, 1992). In fact, a fear of strangers seems to be inherent in our society, in part, because strangers represent the unknown (Silverman & Kennedy, 1993). The reality, though, is that most homicides and the majority of other violent incidents in Canada and elsewhere continue to occur in domestic settings and between persons who know each other well (Gartner, 1995; Fedorowycz, 2000; Silverman & Kennedy, 1993). Prior to the 1970s, little attention focused on violent incidents that occurred within the home or between intimate partners because the common belief was that these acts were "private" affairs (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Schneider, 1994). In recent decades, however, there has been increasing public and private interest in intimate violence and, in particular, the violent victimization of women by their intimate male partners.

The years since the mid-1970s, then, may be especially important for examining recent trends in lethal and non-lethal violence between intimates. During this period, sweeping changes occurred in laws pertaining to intimate violence, the availability of social resources that respond to such violence as well as in the public's awareness of the problem of violence between intimate partners. The coincidence of these two trends – declining rates of intimate violence and an increasing awareness of this type of violence as a serious social problem – leads naturally to the question of their relationship. In other words, to what extent has the social response to domestic violence contributed to declines in lethal and non-lethal violence within intimate relationships?

To adequately address this question, one needs to consider other factors that may be associated with the decline in spousal or intimate partner homicide, and declines in violence generally. For example, during this period, women's socio-economic status improved dramatically both in absolute terms and relative to that of men. What role have improvements in women's lives played in the decline of intimate violence? Moreover, one needs to consider whether the decline in intimate partner violence is merely part of a larger decline in adult violence that has also been documented (Fedorowycz ,2000; Rosenfeld, 2000). Some recent research in the United States has begun to examine these issues (e.g., Browne et al., 1999; Dugan et al., 1999;

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[1] Among research that has examined declining rates of violent crime, homicide has traditionally been used as the unit of analysis because unreported cases of homicide are assumed to be less common than for any other crime and, as a result, come closest to reflecting real crime figures. When accurate data is available for other types of serious violent crime, patterns have been shown to follow those trends exhibited by homicide data. Thus, while homicide may not be a perfect proxy for levels of violent crime, it is the best measure available.

[2] Spousal homicides include those persons in registered or legal marriages, common-law unions as well as persons separated or divorced from such unions.

[3] The definition of intimate partner relationship varies slightly across U.S.-based studies. Generally, however, this category includes current or former spouses (including both legal marriage and common-law unions) as well as current or former boyfriend/girlfriend or dating relationships.

[4] Non-lethal violence includes all acts of interpersonal violence that do not result in death. For example, a sub-section of *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2000* compared rates of violence over time using the 1993 Violence Against Women Survey and the 1999 General Social Survey and demonstrated evidence of a decline in wife assault in recent years. Most indicators showed a decrease in both the frequency and severity of violence committed against women during this period. That is, females reporting being beaten up, threatened with a gun or knife or sexually assaulted was slightly, but significantly lower in 1999 than in 1993 (43% compared to 50%). Furthermore, assaults during this period were also less likely to cause serious injury or require medical attention (for full report, see CCJS, 2000).

Rosenfeld, 2000), but this work is still relatively new. To date, there has been no systematic examination of these questions in Canada.

As a beginning point, then, this paper provides an overview of social science research that has documented the decline in intimate partner homicide and examines various explanations for this phenomenon. More specifically, the goals of this paper are multi-faceted and include:

- To document recent trends in spousal homicide in Canada to determine if this country is experiencing a long-term decline in this type of homicide or a random fluctuation;
- To compare Canadian trends to declines in intimate partner homicide that have been documented in the United States and elsewhere;
- To outline some of the explanations that have been offered for declining rates in intimate partner homicide, beginning with the applicability of explanations for decreases in levels of violence generally;
- To evaluate empirical research that has attempted to systematically assess the validity of these explanations;
- To outline what future research is required to provide a more detailed understanding of this phenomenon, generally, but more specifically, in Canada.

The next section provides a brief overview of intimate partner homicide, beginning with what we know about both the incidence and prevalence of spousal or intimate partner homicide in Canada and elsewhere.[5] This section discusses gender differences in intimate partner homicide, describes the documented link between lethal and non-lethal intimate violence, and identifies some risk factors for this type of violence. The goal of this section is to provide an understanding of this phenomenon in our society, demonstrating why it is important to assess the reality of the apparent decline in this type of violence and to understand what factors may be contributing to these recent trends.

[5] It should be noted here that intimate lethal violence in Canada generally refers to violence that occurs within spousal relationships unless otherwise noted. This includes legal marriages, common-law unions and people separated or divorced from such unions. In contrast, when describing research in the United States, a broader intimate relationship category is the focus, including spousal relationships (both current and former) as well as dating or other non-marital intimate partner relationships.

2.0 An Overview of Intimate Partner Homicide

Since the pioneering work of Marvin Wolfgang (1958) in *Patterns in Criminal Homicide*, researchers have begun to recognize that intriguing theoretical and empirical trends in homicide may often be obscured by a reliance on aggregate national statistics. For example, researchers now recognize that the relationship between a victim and his or her offender is one of the most important characteristics in cases of violent crime. In other words, the motives behind these acts, the events preceding the violent incidents as well as the achieved and/or ascribed characteristics of the victims and offenders may vary depending on the nature of the relationship between the individuals involved (Daly & Wilson, 1988; Gartner et al., 1999; Jayewardene, 1975; Silverman & Kennedy, 1987, 1993; Silverman & Mukherjee, 1987).

Until the 1980s, however, few studies examined lethal killings between intimates or focused on the gender differences in these crimes (Browne et al., 1999). Some studies did isolate various types of homicide such as family, acquaintance, or stranger incidents, but few analyses broke down these categories further to examine lethal acts that occurred between intimate partners (for review, see Decker, 1993). In the past few decades, however, researchers have been making up for lost time and, as a result, there has been a proliferation of research examining lethal violence between intimate partners. Below is a summary of what some of this research has shown.

2.1 Incidence and prevalence of intimate partner homicide

Spousal homicide accounts for a substantial proportion of all homicides in Canada.[6] For example, from 1979 to 1998, spouses represented 15% of all victims of solved homicides and 49% of the victims of family-related incidents.[7] During the same period, more than three times as many wives as husbands were killed by spouses (1,468 women and 433 men) (CCJS, 2000: 40). Thus, between 1979 and 1998, the annual rate of spousal homicide was, on average, 10 wives and 3 husbands per million couples in Canada. The rate of spousal homicide for male and female victims, however, varies by province. For example, based on the figures just discussed, the number of wife victims per one husband victim was 3.4 in Canada during this 20-year period. However, provincial ratios were higher than the national ratio in New Brunswick (7.6) and Quebec (5.5) and lower in the Northwest Territories (1.6), Saskatchewan (1.9) and Nova Scotia (2.0) (CCJS, 2000: 40). In other words, there is greater gender equality in spousal killings in some provinces than others.

2.2 Gender differences in intimate partner homicide

Among homicide researchers, it is recognized that males and females are killed in different numbers, by different people, and in different circumstances. For instance, women are less likely to be victims of homicide than men in virtually all societies. One might assume, then, that women have some type of protective advantage over men because they are less often victims of homicide. However, when gender differences in offending patterns are considered, a different picture is revealed. For instance, males typically account for close to 90% of those accused of homicide annually in Canada and in the majority of other countries (Daly & Wilson, 1988; Fedorowycz, 2000; Polk, 1994). This means that, while men outnumber women as victims, males also dramatically outnumber women as offenders. In other words, women are over-represented as victims and under-represented as offenders; for men, the opposite is true.

Historically and today, research has shown that females primarily victimize and are victimized by family members, especially male intimate partners, whereas

[6] The proportion of spousal homicide in Canada is higher than it is in the United States. According to Silverman & Kennedy (1993), one explanation for this difference is that countries with lower overall homicide rates (i.e., Canada) generally will have a higher proportion of domestic homicides because the latter are less affected than other types of killings by social or cultural forces.

[7] According to official statistics, analyses of spousal homicide are based on victims aged 15 and older. Again, this relationship category includes individuals who are legally married, living common-law, or separated or divorced from such unions. Solved homicides refer to those cleared by police in which an offender has been identified. It should be noted, however, that the Homicide Survey does not systematically follow through on court outcomes in these cases so the individual has been accused, but not yet convicted. Family-related homicides are those that occur between spouses, parents, siblings, and other relations whether by blood or by marriage.

males more often victimize and are victimized by other males, strangers or otherwise (Browne & Williams, 1989; Johnson, 1996; Kellerman & Mercy, 1992; Kruttschnitt, 1993; Messner & Tardiff, 1985; Palmer & Humphrey, 1982; Reiss & Roth, 1993; Wilson, Johnson & Daly, 1992; Wolfgang, 1958). For example, between 1991 and 1993 in Canada, more than 50% of the solved killings of women identified a spouse, an ex-spouse or another intimate partner as the perpetrator (Johnson, 1996: 179-180). Of these, close to 40 percent of the victims were killed by spouses or ex-spouses and 13 percent were killed by their boyfriends or lovers (Johnson, 1996: 180). In contrast, only 6 percent of the male victims were killed by spouses or ex-spouses and 2 percent were killed by girlfriends or lovers (Johnson, 1996: 180). These offending and victimization patterns for intimate partner homicide have been consistent over time (Silverman & Kennedy, 1993).[8]

2.3 Linking lethal and non-lethal intimate partner violence

Research has consistently documented the link between lethal and non-lethal aggression among intimate partners (Browne, 1987; Chimbos, 1978; Daniel & Harris, 1982; Gartner et al., 1999; Johnson, 1996; Totman, 1978; Wolfgang, 1967). It is a well-documented fact that there is often a history of prior violence in intimate partner killings, regardless of whether the victims are male or female. In other words, men who kill their spouses or intimate partners and men who are killed by their spouses or intimates frequently have histories of violent behaviour and, in many cases, it is this violent behaviour that has precipitated their own death (e.g., Campbell, 1995; Johnson, 1996). For example, between 1991 and 1993, police were aware of prior violence between the victim and offender in more than half of the spousal homicide cases (Johnson, 1996). Moreover, police knowledge of prior violence was more likely to be present in cases in which the husbands were killed (68%) than in cases in which wives were killed (52%).[9] Moreover, as the frequency and severity of non-lethal violence between intimates escalates over time, the risk of homicide increases as well.

Official statistics and social science research has demonstrated that lethal killings between spouses also share some common characteristics with non-lethal intimate partner assaults. For example, Johnson (1996) noted that non-lethal intimate violence more often occurs between couples who are living common-law, those with low income levels or sporadic employment, where alcohol abuse is present, and where males exhibit controlling or possessive behaviour. Many of these factors have also been linked to lethal violence between intimate partners. In addition, factors associated with lethal violence between spouses have also been linked to non-lethal violence between intimates (Hart, 1988; Campbell, 1992a, 1992b; Gartner et al., 1999; Kellerman & Mercy, 1992; Kellerman et al., 1993; Sonkin, Martin & Walker, 1985; Wilson et al., 1995). Some of these factors include the use of weapons in prior violent acts, previous threats to kill, serious injury to the victim in prior incidents, sexual violence as part of the abusive relationship, violence during pregnancy, violence/threats against the children, threats of suicide by the offender, and attempts by women to exit from battering relationships.

More recently, criminal harassment such as stalking has been identified as a key correlate of both lethal and non-lethal violence against women by their intimate male partners (Campbell, 1992; Johnson, 1996; McFarlane, 1999; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; Wilson & Daly, 1995). It has also been found to be a key correlate of killings of men (Browne, 1986; Ewing, 1987; Gillespie, 1989). In 1993, amendments were made to the *Criminal Code of Canada* (Bill C-126) that included criminal harassment provisions (such as stalking offences). This move occurred, in part, as a response to a number of highly publicized killings of women by their former male partners because their deaths had occurred after they had been stalked or harassed in other ways by their killers.

To date, there is little data in Canada that documents the relationship between criminal harassment (i.e., stalking behaviours) and non-lethal or lethal violence. However, one recent study examined over 600 cases from police and prosecutor files across Canada to assess how the criminal justice system had been handling complaints of criminal harassment since the provisions had come into effect (Gill & Brockman, 1996).[10] The authors noted that,

[8] Gender differences in intimate partner homicide in Canada resemble patterns found in other Western industrialized nations including Australia, England and Wales, Scotland and Denmark (Wilson & Daly, 1992). Only in the United States does the rate at which females kill their male partners come close to approximating the rate at which men kill female partners. For a more detailed examination of the lack of gender disparity in intimate partner killings in the United States, see Wilson & Daly, 1992.

[9] These figures and other estimates of prior violence in intimate partner homicides likely underestimate the actual incidence of prior violence given that a large number of these incidents never come to the attention of legal authorities (Johnson, 1996).

[10] With regard to the effectiveness of the provisions, the authors noted that while Section 264 was used frequently by police and prosecutors, the majority of criminal harassment charges (58 percent) were stayed or withdrawn before they reached trial (see full report by Gill & Brockman, 1996).

in their sample, 40 percent of the criminal harassment cases that involved intimate partners had previous complaints to the police. In some of these cases, more than one complaint was reported and previous violence in the relationship was reported in half the cases.[11]

In the United States, findings from the National Violence Against Women survey (NVAW) support the correlation between stalking and other forms of violence against female intimate partners, both lethal and non-lethal in nature. Examining this data, Tjaden & Thoennes (1998) reported that, of those women who indicated that they had been stalked in the preceding 12-month period, 62% of the women had been stalked by current or former intimate partners.[12] Examining the experiences of these women, the survey showed that 81% of those who had been stalked by current or former husbands or cohabiting partners had also been physically assaulted by that same partner. Other research has highlighted the link between intimate partner physical assault and stalking for femicide victims as well as victims of attempted femicide (McFarlane et al., 1999).

Based on this research, one can safely conclude that previous violence in a relationship is a risk factor for killings between intimate partners. In addition, the examination of gender differences in intimate partner homicide also indicates that being female is a risk factor for these types of killings. Various other situational factors as well as some victim and/or offender characteristics have been identified as risk factors for homicides between intimate partners. A discussion of some of these factors and characteristics appears below.

2.4 Some risk factors for intimate partner homicide

If researchers are to determine possible contributors to declining rates of intimate partner homicide, it is important to know what groups are at greater risk with respect to this type of violence. A number of high-risk groups or situations are discussed below that research has shown are associated with an increase in the likelihood of spousal or intimate partner lethal violence.

Race/Ethnicity. Intimate partners in particular race or ethnic groups have been shown to be at greater risk of lethal victimization than members of other race or ethnic groups. For example, in the United States, the risk of becoming a victim of intimate partner homicide is particularly high for African-Americans compared to Whites or Latinos (e.g., Block & Christakos, 1995; Dobash et al., 1992; Kellerman & Mercy, 1992; Wilson & Daly, 1992). In Canada, such research has been more difficult to conduct because of restrictions placed on the collection and publication of crime statistics by race and ethnicity categories. However, available data on Aboriginal Canadians demonstrate that this group is over-represented among homicide victims and has been consistently so over time (Statistics Canada, 1987; see also, Jayewardene, 1975; Kennedy et al., 1989; Moyer, 1992).[13]

With respect to intimate partner killings, for example, a study of intimate femicide in one province found that, between 1974 and 1994, at least six percent of the intimate femicide victims in Ontario were Aboriginal women (Gartner et al., 1999). At first, this percentage may not appear to be large until it is compared to census data that demonstrate, during the same period, slightly less than one percent of all women living in Ontario classified themselves as Aboriginal. As a result, Aboriginal women in Ontario appear to be over-represented among the victims of intimate femicide, a phenomenon that encompasses all killings of women by intimate partners, including current and estranged legal and common-law partners, boyfriends and dating partners (see also Daly & Wilson, 1988; Regoeczi, 2001).

Age. Young wives and husbands are at a greater risk of becoming victims of spousal homicide than spouses in other age categories (CCJS, 2000). For example, in the 1990s, both women and men less than 25 years old were at greatest risk of being killed by their spouse. Women were killed at a rate of 22 per million couples whereas young husbands were killed by their wives at a rate of 10 per million couples (almost half that of young wives). Women between the ages of 25-34 and 35-44 were the next most likely to be killed by their husbands (11 per million couples). Previous research also suggests that age disparity may be related to spousal homicide (Wilson & Daly, 1988, 1992; Wilson et al., 1993). For

[11] The authors note, as other researchers have, that this percentage is probably an underestimate of the actual occurrence of previous violence because it counts only those cases in which the police sought out and recorded the information in the file as part of the case summary or the brief prepared for the bail hearing. This would not necessarily occur in all cases, particularly if no physical violence was evident in the current case. Moreoever, these figures also rely on the complainant having reported the previous violence.

[12] Of these women, 38% had been stalked by current or former husbands, 10% by current or former cohabiting partners, and 14% by current or former dating partners or boyfriends.

[13] Because most Aboriginal homicides are intra-racial (as is the case with the majority of homicides), this group is over-represented among suspects as well (e.g., Moyer, 1992).

example, younger wives who are married to older husbands are at an increased risk of spousal homicide compared to couples who are similar in age (see Wilson et al., 1993).

Relationship State. Research in Canada as well as Great Britain, Australia, and the United States has demonstrated that relationship state is strongly associated with the risk of intimate partner homicide involving female victims *only* (Block & Christakos, 1995; Campbell, 1992; Gartner et al., 1999; Johnson, 1996; Wallace, 1986; Wilson & Daly, 1993; Wilson, Daly & Wright, 1993). Relationship state refers to whether the victim and offender were estranged at the time of the killing. This research has consistently shown that women are at an increased risk of being killed by male partners when they have separated or are attempting to separate but the actual separation has not yet occurred (e.g., Saltzman & Mercy, 1993; Gartner et al., 1999).

Several explanations have been offered for this phenomenon. First, compared to co-residing couples, estranged couples are more likely to have a history of domestic violence (Johnson & Sacco, 1995; Rodgers, 1994). It may be, then, that the previous violence is associated with decisions by women to leave abusive relationships and with their greater risk of lethal victimization. Further, male sexual proprietariness has been highlighted as a possible explanation for elevated risks of homicide in cases of estrangement. In other words, several studies cite the male's inability to accept the termination of the relationship and his obsessive desire to maintain control over his sexual partner (Polk, 1994; see also Campbell, 1992; Wilson & Daly, 1993). According to Polk (1994), "He would destroy his intimate 'possession' rather than let her fall into the hands of a competitor male." (p 29)

Relationship Status. A similar body of research shows that relationship status is also associated with a higher risk of spousal or intimate partner killings. Relationship status refers to whether a couple was legally married, living common-law or dating at the time of the killing. Studies have shown that both wives and husbands incur far greater risks of lethal victimization in common-law unions than in legal marriages (Campbell, 1992; Gartner et al., 1999; Johnson, 1996; Rodriguez & Henderson, 1995; Wallace, 1986; Wilson & Daly, 1993; Wilson, Daly & Wright, 1993).

The higher risk of spousal homicide associated with common-law status has been interpreted in a number of ways. First, compared to couples in legal marriages, common-law partners are more likely to be poor, young, unemployed and childless – all factors associated with higher homicide rates (Johnson, 1996; Stets, 1991). Alternatively, similar to estrangement, male sexual proprietariness has been offered as an explanation for the higher risk among common-law couples. For example, it has been suggested that husbands may feel less secure in their proprietary claims over wives in common-law relationships than in legal marriages (Wilson, Johnson & Daly, 1995). It may be, then, that these men are more likely to resort to serious violence to enforce those claims or to use lethal violence when those claims are challenged. With respect to female-perpetrated homicides in common-law relationships, it may be that such unions involve greater levels of unequal exchange and this lays the foundation for increased conflict. For example, expectations and investments in the relationship may not be similar. This, in turn, prompts extreme forms of violence by some women, compared to that witnessed in other types of intimate partner relationships (Rodriguez & Henderson, 1995).

Weapon Use. Considerable research suggests that the likelihood of death in a violent incident is associated with the type of weapon available (Cook & Moore, 1994; Saltzman et al., 1992). If used, a knife and, especially, a firearm are much more likely to result in death than other types of weapons (Felson & Messner, 1996; Zimring, 1972). Gun ownership is also strongly linked to domestic homicides (Kellerman et al., 1993; Dansys, 1992). In Canada, gun control regulation is more stringent than in the United States, however, firearms are still the most frequently used weapons in the commission of spousal homicides. For example, between 1979 and 1998, guns were used in more than one third (36%) of the spousal homicides (CCJS, 2000: 41). The most common firearms used in Canada are rifles and shotguns (63%) followed by sawed-off rifles and shotguns (21%) and handguns (16%).

It has been argued that the prevalence of firearms in domestic incidents can be largely attributed to the fact that husbands, who make up the majority of the accused, tend to use firearms to kill their female partners. In contrast, the majority of cases in which women kill their husbands involve the use of knives or other sharp instruments.[14] For example, in 1999, close to 40% of the wives killed by their husbands were shot whereas more than 60% of the male victims were stabbed by their wives (Fedorowycz, 2000: 11). The

[14] Firearms are the second most popular weapon of choice for women.

differences in the relative use of weapons by males and females have been consistent in Canada over time (Wilson & Daly, 1994).

Alcohol or Drug Use. Drug or alcohol use has also been identified as an important factor in intimate partner homicides (CCJS, 2000; Miller, Downs & Gondoli, 1989). In Canada, from 1979 to 1998, there were reports of alcohol and/or drug abuse in close to 40% of the spousal homicide cases (CCJS, 2000: 41). Drugs were less frequently used by both male and female accused (see also Gartner et al., 1999). Alcohol was also identified as a risk factor for non-lethal spousal violence in both the 1993 Violence Against Women Survey and the 1993 General Social Survey (Johnson, 1996). In short, women and men married to, or living with, heavy drinkers are more likely to be assaulted than those who do not live with heavy drinkers. However, the problem with most information on drug or alcohol use is that it is not reliable (see Block & Christakos, 1995). One reason for this is that this information is not consistently documented in official police records, often the primary source of information. When it is collected, records may only note that alcohol did play a role in the crime, but little additional information is provided such as who was drinking and how much alcohol was consumed (one drink or excessive amounts).

2.5 Summary

Women and men who are killed by and who kill intimate partners come from all classes, all age groups, and all cultural or ethnic backgrounds - in other words, they come from all walks of life. However, research has shown that some situations and some groups are at a greater risk of this type of lethal violence. For example, being female and experiencing previous violence in the intimate relationship are recognized risk factors for intimate partner or spousal homicide. Furthermore, Aboriginal women, young wives and husbands, those who live common-law, couples who are estranged, disputes involving guns and relationships where alcohol abuse is present are just some of the other risk factors that have been identified to date.

Research continues to examine and identify other situations or individuals who are at a greater risk of lethal violence within intimate relationships. For example, a recent JAMA science news update reported findings from a Maryland study that showed pregnant or recently pregnant women in that state were more likely to be victims of homicide than to die of any other cause.[15] While this study did not indicate who the offenders were in these cases, the finding is consistent with other studies that have demonstrated pregnancy may be a risk factor for both lethal and non-lethal intimate violence (see Johnson, 1996).[16] Future research is needed, however, to understand this association.

Below, the phenomenon of spousal homicide in Canada is described within the context of levels of violent crime generally in this country. Several dimensions that lead to variation in the incidence or prevalence of spousal homicide are also discussed.

[15] Researchers from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in Baltimore, Maryland, used surveillance techniques to determine the numbers and causes of pregnancy-related deaths that occurred in Maryland between 1993 and 1998. They found that, out of the 247 pregnancy-associated deaths during this period, homicide was determined to be the cause in one-fifth or 50 of those cases.

[16] For example, the Canadian Violence Against Women Survey found that more than one-fifth of abused women were assaulted during their pregnancy and, in 40 percent of those incidents, the violence began when the woman became pregnant (Johnson, 1996).

3.0 Situating Intimate Partner Homicide in Canada

Documenting violent crime trends in Canada and elsewhere often involves using information from multiple sources of data. While these sources may not always be fully comparable, they generally offer a relatively accurate picture of long-term trends, particularly in the case of homicide. Sufficiently reliable data on homicide in Canada were not available before the 1920s. Beginning in 1921, however, numbers and rates of deaths due to homicide, as determined by medical examiners, were collected and published yearly by the Department of Vital Statistics. More recently, in 1962, the Canadian Uniform Crime Reporting Survey was established. This move allowed for more systematic data collection, including information that described the characteristics of the homicide incidents and of the individuals involved.[17]

During the past century, then, the methods and purposes underlying the collection of homicide data in Canada have varied. However, discrepancies are minimal and do not appear to affect overall estimates of homicide trends over time (Gartner, 1995). Below, general trends in the Canadian homicide rate are outlined. This is followed by a description of both regional and urban/rural variations as well as an examination of trends in homicide rates disaggregated by gender and victim-offender relationship. This section concludes with a brief comparison of trends experienced in this country and those that have been documented in the United States.[18]

3.1 General trends in Canadian homicide victimization rates

After peaking in the 1990s, the crime rate in Canada has been declining steadily (Tremblay, 2000). For example, during the past eight years, the crime rate has decreased by about 4 percent per year and, in 1999, was at its lowest since 1979 (Tremblay, 2000: 3). The violent crime rate also declined in 1999 for its seventh consecutive year in all violent crime categories (Tremblay, 2000). Prior to this decline, the violent crime rate had increased for 15 years in a row. As a result, despite recent decreases, the rates of violence in Canada are still 5% higher than ten years ago and 57% higher than two decades ago. The exception to this is the national homicide rate that has been falling steadily since the mid-1970s. In 1999, the year for which most recent statistics are available, the homicide rate was 1.8 per 100,000, the lowest since 1967. These declines are largely attributable to decreases in the adult homicide rate (Fedorowycz, 2000). Youth homicide rates have remained low and stable for the past several decades.

As noted above, fairly reliable data on the nation's homicide rate have been systematically collected since 1921 and, during this period, four distinct trends are evident.[19]

- ***From 1921 to 1930:*** The homicide rate rose dramatically during this period, reaching a peak in 1930 that exceeded 2 per 100,000 in the population. Such a peak was not seen again until 1970.
- ***From 1930 to the mid-1960s:*** After peaking in 1930, a second trend saw the homicide rate decline through the Depression years and, then, stabilize until the mid-1960s. The lowest homicide rate recorded during the period between 1921 and 1999 was in 1950, during this decline.[20]
- ***From the mid-1960s to 1975:*** After several years of stability, the most dramatic rise in the Canadian homicide rate took place between 1966 and 1975, representing a third distinct trend. This period saw the annual rates of lethal violence increase steadily from 1.25 in 1966 to a peak of 3.03 in 1975, an increase of 142% (Fedorowycz,

[17] From 1961 to 1973, detailed data were collected and reported on first- and second-degree murders. Data on the characteristics of manslaughter and infanticide cases have been collected since 1974.

[18] Few other countries have examined trends in intimate partner homicide over time with which comparisons can be made. The one exception is Australia, however, their rate of homicide from 1989-2000 has demonstrated remarkable stability (Mouzos, 2001). There has been a slight decline in the number of female homicide victims annually, but no figures were available for spousal or intimate partner homicides (Mouzos, 1999).

[19] This section draws primarily from work by Gartner (1995), Silverman & Kennedy (1993) and recent reports on homicide and criminal victimization available from the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (Fedorowycz, 2000; Tremblay, 2000).

[20] The homicide rate rose for a brief period immediately following the Second World War. It has been speculated that this blip was associated with various factors, including the return of males after the end of the war, various changes in family structure, and women's roles at home or in the workplace (Silverman & Kennedy, 1993). Overall, however, annual homicide rates were relatively stable between 1944 and the mid-1960s, ranging between 1 and 1.5 per 100,000.

1999: 3). The mean annual homicide rate in the 1970s was the highest recorded for any decade.

- ***From 1976 to 1999:*** The most recent statistics available indicate that this country is experiencing what can be referred to as a fourth trend that, despite yearly fluctuations, is perceived to be a steady decline. This decline is attributed largely to the decreasing number of adult homicides from 1975 to 1999. In 1990, the homicide rate was 2.4 per 100,000, about the same as the 1970 level. A decade later – in 1999 – Canadians are witnessing the lowest recorded homicide rate in over 30 years.

These general trends, however, vary somewhat, depending on a number of factors. In the next several sections, variations in homicide trends in this country are discussed.

3.2 Spatial variation in Canadian homicide rates

When rates of homicide are aggregated at the national level, important spatial differences in the risk of homicide are often obscured. For example, large cities and rural areas may often exhibit higher homicide rates than smaller cities and towns (see Archer & Gartner, 1984). Moreover, various regions in a country may have consistently higher rates of violent crime than those experienced in other regions. In Canada, provincial and urban/rural variation in homicide rates have been consistently documented. A discussion of spatial variations in homicide trends is included because types of homicide (i.e., spousal, other family or stranger) have also been shown to vary by region and size of the population. Furthermore, these variations may be essential to understanding what and how various social changes may be contributing to recent trends in spousal homicide.

Regional homicide trends in Canada. Throughout the twentieth century, provincial homicide rates have consistently shown distinct east-to-west trends with the Western region of the country experiencing higher homicide rates than the Eastern provinces. For example, during the past few decades, Newfoundland has had the lowest mean annual homicide rate whereas British Columbia and, more recently, Manitoba have had the highest (Fedorowycz, 2000). When the Yukon and Northwest Territories are included, however, the east-to-west pattern shifts to a south-to-north variation. This is because homicide rates in the Territories are two to three times higher than those in British Columbia, and more than 10 times higher than the rates in Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island (Gartner, 1995). And, while homicide trends have varied somewhat within provinces over time, the overall pattern in regional differences remains fairly constant.

There are also differences between provinces in the rate at which specific types of homicide occur. For example, more than 40% of the homicides that occur in the Atlantic provinces as well as Ontario, the Prairies and the Territories involve intimate partners or family members. In contrast, less than one-quarter of the homicides that take place in Quebec and less than one-third of the lethal incidents that occur in British Columbia are between intimate partners or family members. One factor that may set Quebec and British Columbia apart from other regions in the country may be the large number of homicides that remain unsolved in these two provinces (15 and 30 percent respectively) (Gartner, 1995).

Urban and rural variations in homicide rates. A common assumption exists that people in urban areas or large cities are more likely to be victims of violence than people in rural settings. Fear of crime is also much higher among city residents than residents of smaller towns and rural locations (Sacco & Johnson, 1990). Empirical evidence supports this assumption and the public's accompanying fear that victimization is more likely to occur in cities. For example, in most countries, the largest cities have higher homicide rates than the country as a whole (Archer & Gartner, 1984). Community size or population density, then, is another way that spatial variations can lead to varying levels of homicide. And, while it is believed that the larger communities have greater risks of victimization, research has shown that the homicide rate in most rural areas of Canada is only slightly below that of the largest cities (Gartner, 1995).[21]

[21] Similarly, in the United States, extremely rural locations tend to have higher homicide rates than those recorded for small-to-medium sized cities that range from 10,000 to 100,000 residents (Archer & Gartner, 1984). However, compared to the United States, the rural contribution to homicide rates is greater and the urban contribution is less in Canada.

3.3 Trends in total homicide victimization rates by gender

Historically, males make up about two-thirds of Canada's homicide victims while females represent approximately one-third of homicide victims (Fedorowycz, 2000). For example, Gartner (1995) showed that, between 1921-1990, women accounted for about 36% of the homicide victims known to authorities. This pattern holds true for the past decade and for the most recent statistics available for 1999. This gender gap in homicide victimization has remained stable over time because male and female trends in homicide are generally similar. In addition, research has shown that it is lethal violence involving male victims that drives the homicide rate and this pattern has been observed for several societies (Daly & Wilson, 1988; Gartner, 1990; Silverman & Kennedy, 1993).

3.4 Victim-offender relationship and homicide, 1961-1999

The relationship between a crime victim and his or her offender has long been recognized as an important factor in the study of homicide and other serious violent crime. In Canada, detailed information on the type of victim-offender relationship has been available since the early 1960s. And, while the Homicide Survey allows for the classification of over 30 different victim-offender relationships, researchers tend to examine a smaller number of conceptually important relationships (see review, Decker, 1993). Traditionally, research has focused on five specific types of homicide defined by the victim-offender relationship: spouses[22], other family members, friends, acquaintances and strangers.

Between 1961 and 1990, the proportion of killings that involved strangers increased steadily whereas more intimate murders have declined since the early 1960s (Silverman & Kennedy, 1993). In the past decade, however, the proportion of stranger homicides has remained relatively stable, ranging from 12% to 16% (Fedorowycz, 2000). At the same time, intimate murders have continued to decline up to and during the past decade.[23] While killings among friends and acquaintances also rose between 1961-1990, homicides involving these two relationship categories have begun to decline in the past several years. However, friends and acquaintances remain two of the largest victim-offender categories of all solved homicides in Canada.[24]

With respect to spousal homicide, a recent report indicated that declines were evident during the 20-year period covering 1979 to 1998, particularly for wives (CCJS, 2000). For wives, the rate decreased from 15 per million couples in 1979 to 7 per million couples in 1998 whereas for husbands, the rate declined from a high of 5 per million couples in 1987 to 2 per million in 1998. Recall, however, that according to a recent *Juristat* report, declines in spousal homicide did not begin until the early 1990s (Fedorowycz, 2000). It is not clear why these two reports differ in their identification of declining trends in spousal homicide nor if differential declines noted for male and female victims are statistically significant. Possible sources of this variation will be discussed in a later section on limitations of this research. With respect to the perceived declining spousal homicide rate, it is interesting to note that the most recent official statistics available indicate that, in the past three years, rates of spousal homicide have remained stable with a slight increase being noted for 1999 (Fedorowycz, 2000).[25] As a result, the reality of these declines is not as clear as originally perceived. The problem in determining whether spousal homicide rates are actually declining becomes more complex as illustrated by a provincial study discussed below that incorporates a broader definition of intimate partner relationships.

Intimate femicide in Ontario, 1974-1994. Because of the rate at which women are killed by their intimate male partners, recent research has begun to focus on this as a separate phenomenon – intimate femicide[26] – that requires specific examination. As part of this move, a provincial study of intimate femicide was conducted in Ontario, documenting the characteristics of these killings and the individuals involved over a 21-year period. According to Gartner et al. (1999), between 1974-

[22] The spousal category, as mentioned earlier, may be narrowly defined as current and former legal marriages and common-law relationships. More recently, however, the trend has been to use a broader definition of intimate partner relationships that encompass dating relationships (i.e., boyfriends and girlfriends).

[23] Problems created by varying definitions of spousal or intimate partner homicide will be discussed in more detail in the section on methodological limitations.

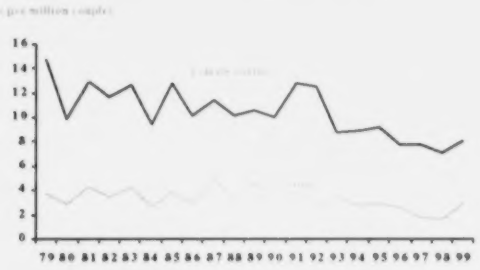
[24] Decker (1993) has argued that the acquaintance category should be explored further because it accounts for a substantial proportion of homicides within each gender category. It may be that victim-offender relationships that are not easily classified are included in the acquaintance category. Furthermore, distinguishing between acquaintance relationships or friends can be somewhat arbitrary.

[25] The number of homicides that occurred in 2000 is not yet available.

[26] Intimate femicide includes killings of women by current or former legal spouses, common-law partners or boyfriends.

1994, the rate of intimate femicide ranged from a low of .55 in 1978 to a high of 1.26 in 1991. Despite yearly fluctuations, however, the rate at which women were killed by male intimate partners appeared to follow no particular trend over time. Dividing the 21-year-period in half suggests otherwise, however: the average annual rate for the second half of the period (1.02) was slightly higher than the rate for the first half (.92).

Figure 1: Rates of Spousal Homicide, 1978-1999



On its own, the authors argue that this difference is not statistically nor substantively significant. However, when intimate femicide rates are compared to significant decreases in other types of lethal violence, the slightly higher rate of intimate femicide in the latter period takes on greater importance. For example, the annual rate at which women were killed by strangers or unknown assailants declined significantly from an average of .27 during 1974-1983 to .16 during 1984-1994. Similarly, the annual rate at which men were killed by their spouses declined significantly, from an average rate of .31 during 1974-1983 to .18 during 1984-1994. So, during a period when women's risks from strangers and men's risks from spouses decreased, women's risks from their intimate partners increased slightly. In other words, after 1984 – a period of substantial expansion in services for abused women – men's risks of being killed by intimate partners decreased significantly whereas women's risks did not.

The findings of this study cover a slightly different period of time than the reports discussed above and the intimate femicide study focuses on one province only, however, the rate of intimate femicide in Ontario has been shown to be similar to the rate for the entire nation (Crawford et al., 1997). Thus, the basic findings of this provincial study appear to contradict the finding that women's rate of lethal victimization by intimate partners has declined more rapidly than that for male victims during the past several decades. In fact, while not statistically significant, this study found that the rate at which women were killed by intimate partners increased slightly while the male rate decreased. The reason for these seemingly contradictory findings will be discussed in the section on methodological limitations.

Next, an examination of the situation south of the border demonstrates that, in contrast to perceived trends in Canada, women in the United States do not appear to be benefiting from declines in lethal violence at the rate experienced by their male counterparts.

3.5 Comparing declines in Canada and the United States

The decline in intimate partner homicide appears to coincide with a general decline in adult homicide in Canada and other Western nations, particularly the United States. Generally, the comparison of crime rates between the United States and other developed countries, including Canada, is not that useful given the uniqueness of the violent crime picture south of the border. However, when comparing trends rather than rates, a comparison of the two countries may be informative. For example, despite the larger numbers of all crimes that occur in the United States compared to Canada, the general homicide trends are quite similar: that is, both countries are experiencing a decline in this type of violence and have been for more than two decades. With respect to intimate partner homicide[27], however, U.S.-based research has documented a longer declining trend for this type of homicide than that witnessed in Canada. Some of the findings from this research are highlighted below, focusing on documented variations in trends for certain subgroups of the population in the United States.

First, as noted briefly already, a decline in intimate partner homicides in the United States has been documented for a period of more than two decades (Greenfeld et al., 1998; Puzone et al., 2000). This research has also highlighted that the rate at which men are killed by female partners has decreased more rapidly

[27] Again, intimate partner homicide in U.S.-based research includes killings that occur between current or former legal spouses, common-law partners or boyfriends and girlfriends (e.g., Greenfeld et al., 1998).

than the rate at which females are killed by male partners in the United States (Browne et al., 1999; Dugan et al., 1999; Greenfeld et al., 1998; Puzone et al., 2000). For example, one study found that between 1976-1995, male victimization rates decreased by 75% while female lethal victimization rates decreased by only 41% (Puzone et al., 2000: 415). In addition, U.S. researchers have demonstrated that lethal victimization rates have declined more rapidly for some intimate partners than for others. That is, rates have declined more rapidly for marital partners (including current and former legal and common-law partners) than for non-marital partners (i.e., boyfriends and girlfriends).[28]

Further variations in trends are shown when rates are disaggregated by race. For example, intimate partner killings between Blacks in the United States declined at a faster rate than intimate partner homicides between Whites. One study demonstrated that the intimate partner homicide rate among Blacks dropped from 11 times that of Whites to just over four times higher than the intimate partner homicide rate among Whites (Greenfeld et al., 1998).

When homicide rates were disaggregated by both race and gender of the victims and offenders for these two decades, the per capita rates of intimate partner homicide decreased an average of 8 percent for Black males, 5 percent for Black females, 4 percent for White males, and 1 percent for White females (Greenfeld et al., 1998: 7). Finally, while declines were uniform across all race/gender/relationship type categories, one study found that the rate at which White, unmarried females were killed by intimate partners increased slightly (Puzone et al., 2000).

3.6 Summary

The ability to differentiate between stable trends and temporary fluctuations in violent crimes rates (or any social phenomenon for that matter) is crucial to understanding the source(s) of these patterns (Donohue, 1998). For example, distinguishing stable declines from random fluctuations may help determine how levels of violence are influenced by policy changes within social, legal and criminal justice realms as well as how varying social, economic and/or demographic conditions may have an impact (Donohue, 1998). As a result, it is important to determine whether patterns represent temporary improvements that vary around long-term trends or if they signal precipitous and sustained changes from earlier patterns.

In Canada, while the homicide rate has been declining since the mid-1970s, it has only been since the early 1990s that declines in spousal homicide have been documented (Fedorowycz, 2000).[29] Moreover, in the past three years, official statistics indicate that rates of spousal homicide have remained stable with a slight increase in 1999 (Fedorowycz, 2000). Based on this information, it is not clear whether our country is witnessing the beginning of a long-term decline in spousal homicide or merely a random fluctuation. In other words, if the decline did not began until 1992 and rates have been stable for the past three years (from 1997 to 1999), the perceived decline period spans only five years.

In addition, it is not clear whether female victims are experiencing significantly greater declines in lethal victimization compared to male victims, as indicated by one report (CCJS, 2000). One difficulty stems from the fact that the smaller number of spousal homicides committed by women mean declining numbers have a more dramatic effect on their overall rates compared to the effect of similar declines on the overall rate of spousal homicides perpetrated by men. As a result, this issue requires further exploration and it is an interesting question given that, in the United States, the opposite is true: the rate at which male victims are being killed by intimate partners has decreased significantly faster than the rate at which females are being killed by male partners. These issues will be addressed further in the section on future research.

In the next section, various explanations that have been offered for general declines in homicide are examined to determine how these factors may contribute to an understanding of declines in intimate partner or spousal homicide, more specifically. The majority of the work described has, for the most part, been conducted almost exclusively by researchers in the United States.

[28] Rates for non-marital intimate partner homicide are calculated by using the percentage of the population that is 15 years and older in the single, never-married category.

[29] Again, varying patterns have been noted, but according to the annual homicide report published by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, declines in spousal killings began in the early 1990s.

4.0 Understanding the Decline in Intimate Partner Homicide: Assessing the Utility of Explanations for the General Decline in Homicide

The decline in homicide rates generally and, more specifically, of the adult homicide rate has prompted a number of researchers, primarily in the United States, to examine various explanations for these trends (e.g., Blumstein & Wallman, 2000). The factors that have been the main focus of this research are macro-level variables including the role of handguns, the impact of imprisonment, changes in policing, as well as the role of demography including changes in the sex, race, and/or age composition of the population.[30]

While some of these factors may seem less relevant to Canada, it would be erroneous to assume that there has been little to no effect. For example, while handguns have not been a particular problem in this country, at least compared to the United States, we have experienced numerous changes in the past several decades with respect to gun control legislation. Moreover, as discussed above, a large proportion of spousal homicides in this country involve guns. Therefore, it is important to understand how some of these factors may or may not be contributing to declines in homicide in Canada and, in particular, how such factors might help researchers understand the recent trends in spousal homicide. In the next section, explanations specific to trends in lethal violence between intimate partners are discussed as well as the research that has systematically assessed the validity of these perspectives.

4.1 Gun control

In the late 1970s, gun control became a prominent issue in Canada when amendments were made to the *Criminal Code*, increasing the power of criminal justice officials to prohibit access to firearms by criminals and other dangerous persons. At the same time, a number of other changes were implemented, including more severe sanctions for gun-related crimes.[31] An extensive evaluation of the effects of these reforms indicated that there were moderate declines in the use of firearms in crimes as well as in suicides and accidents (Scarff, 1983). Additional changes that occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s further strengthened gun control provisions in this country by expanding again the list of restricted and prohibited weapons and applying more restrictions on access to weapons by those accused and/or convicted of criminal offences.

While general declines in homicide began in the mid-1970s in Canada – prior to the implementation of these changes – a 1992 Department of Justice Canada report, covering the period between 1975 and 1990, indicated that all homicides involving firearms declined during this period, but domestic homicides[32] involving firearms showed the sharpest declines. For example, in 1990, there were only 48 victims of domestic homicide involving firearms, the lowest number reported since 1975. Based on these figures, the report concluded that since the 1978 amendments to the *Criminal Code*, the number of domestic homicide incidents involving firearms had steadily declined.

Since that time, additional changes have been made to The *Firearms Act*,[33] some of which were meant to specifically target spousal violence. For example, a new spousal notification line has been implemented that provides an outlet for concerned citizens to report certain individuals and, in particular spouses, who should not be allowed to possess firearms. Since December 1, 1998, this line has received over 22,000 calls from across the country. In addition, a new Firearms Interest to Police (FIP) database logs information about individuals such as whether they have been involved in a violent incident in the recent past or whether they have a history of mental illness. Police use this information to

[30] See also a special issue on this topic in *The Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology*, 88(4).
[31] According to a report commissioned by the Department of Justice Canada, other moves included changes in the types of firearms that were banned or for which use was restricted; regulations surrounding the sale of firearms were tightened and a new process was implemented requiring that an acquisition form be filled out for those wishing to buy a firearm (DANSYS Consultants Inc., 1992).
[32] Domestic homicide refers to spouses including common-law and other kin (i.e., parent, grandparent, sibling, in-law, aunt/uncle or cousin).
[33] In particular, sections 5 and 70 of the Act respond to public safety concerns.

screen people who apply for firearms licences. In particular, the new program supplies police with information to help them decide what guns need to be removed from a domestic violence site.[34] Moreover, as part of this new program, when a person applies for a firearms possession and acquisition licence, they are required to have their present and past spouse (or common-law partner) sign the application, verifying that they are aware of the application. If for any reason the spouse chooses not to sign the application, it will prompt an investigation.[35]

Generally, since 1976, firearms have been used in about one-third of all homicides annually. For example, in 1999, firearms were used in 31% (165) of the homicides (Fedorowycz, 2000). While this represents a 9% increase over the total number of firearms homicides the previous year, the figure is 20% lower than the average for the previous 10 years (at 205 per year). In fact, the 1998 figure was the lowest since data were first collected nationally in 1961. This suggests that stricter gun control legislation may be having some impact on lethal violence between spouses, but further research is required that systematically examines this association.

4.2 The role of incarceration

In recent years, a major crime-reduction strategy in the United States has been to imprison more criminals. Basically, the assumption behind this move is that more imprisonment reduces crime through the effects of incapacitation and deterrence (e.g., Devine, Sheley & Smith, 1988; Zimring & Hawkins, 1995). The rationale behind the move to use imprisonment to reduce crime rests on two beliefs. First, imprisoned criminals cannot commit the crimes that they normally would have if still out on the street. Second, the increased chance of imprisonment and the likelihood of longer prison terms should act as a deterrent for future criminal offending. However, a review of seven recent U.S.-based studies that examined the effect of prison growth on the homicide rate showed that findings were inconsistent with respect to the relationship between incarceration rates and homicide (Marvell & Moody, 1997). That is, of the seven studies reviewed, three found little or no impact (Levitt, 1996; Marvell & Moody, 1994; Zimring & Hawkins, 1995) and four found a negative association (Bowker, 1981; Cohen & Land, 1987; Devine et al., 1988; Marvell & Moody, 1997).

The role of deterrence in the case of homicide, however, is thought to be minimal (Chambliss, 1984). In other words, scholars believe that because most homicides are expressive or spontaneous in nature, the deterrent effects of crime control strategies, including imprisonment, will have little or no effect on these crimes (Parker & Smith, 1979; Thomas & Williams 1977). In the case of homicides that occur between intimates, the situation is exacerbated. That is, most researchers perceive such acts to be "crimes of passion" that involve little or no consideration of the possible punishments for their actions (Loftin, 1986; Maxfield, 1989; Messner & Tardiff, 1985; Parker & Smith, 1979; Rojek & Williams, 1993; Sampson, 1987; Smith & Parker, 1980).

More recent research in the United States shows that increasing rates of incarceration have had some impact on declining rates of homicide in their country.[36] Canada, however, has been witnessing a gradual decline in the rate of imprisonment over the past decade. For example, in 1998-1999, the total number of adult admissions to custody declined for the sixth consecutive year, representing a 14% decrease from 1992-1993, the peak year for custodial admissions after a growth period in the preceding ten years (Thomas, 2000).[37] However, it is interesting to note that declines in spousal homicide began at about the same time as our country's imprisonment rate peaked. If there were an association between prison population growth and decreases in the violent crime rate, one would expect a lag period between increasing rates of imprisonment and declines in violence. In other words, the impact of increased imprisonment on levels of violence or crime generally would not be instantaneous. This issue, however, would require further examination.

4.3 Varying economic levels and homicide

It is a common argument that crime rates are associated with levels of economic hardship experienced in society. As a result, researchers examining the effect of the

[34] Police officers can access the registry information from their cruiser through a computer terminal or from their communications centre (Canadian Firearms Centre 2001).

[35] For example, in August 1999, a Nova Scotia woman used the spousal notification line to report that her estranged husband was applying for a licence and, because she had refused to sign the form, he was going to indicate that he did not have a spouse. She informed the police that she was concerned about her safety and that of her children. She later filed a complaint with her local police agency in order to generate a reference on the FIP. This means that if her estranged husband tries to obtain a licence in the future, it will automatically trigger an investigation (Canadian Firearms Centre, 2001).

[36] See Rosenfeld (2000) and Spelman (2000) for the most recent discussions of this issue.

[37] This includes custodial admissions at the federal, provincial and territorial levels.

economy have tended to focus on the direct relationship between various measures of economic stress and aggregate crime rates. For example, economic stress or hardship is often captured using measures of economic inequality, poverty and unemployment levels (LaFree, 1999). Thus, the economy has been one of a multitude of factors that has been examined in recent research on declining violent crime rates in the United States (see Grogger, 2000). Traditionally, a positive association between economic inequality and homicide rates has been among one of the most consistent findings in cross-national research on homicide rates (see review, LaFree, 1999). In contrast, however, findings related to another common measure of economic stress – unemployment – have not supported the economic stress model. That is, in a review of such studies, LaFree (1999) found no study that demonstrated percent unemployed was positively related to the aggregate homicide rate in cross-national studies.

Few studies, however, have examined how economic stress affects homicide rates disaggregated by type of victim-offender relationship. One exception is work by Parker and Smith (1979) who examined whether different factors contributed to rates of primary and non-primary homicides, testing the deterrence model and an etiological model of homicide.[38] The authors defined primary homicide as that which occurs between intimates while non-primary homicides are those events that occur between acquaintances and strangers. Underlying their analysis is the assumption that these two types of homicides have different origins. More specifically, they suggest that primary homicide most frequently stems from acts of passion whereas non-primary homicide more often involves some degree of decision-making or intent.[39] Testing the deterrence model, they found that certainty of punishment predicted non-primary homicides only, supporting their hypothesis. However, when variables in the etiological model were added, certainty of punishment was no longer significantly associated with the rate of non-primary homicide. In the final model, a key factor in the etiological model – the structural poverty index[40] – was a significant predictor of both types of homicide.[41] Thus, it appears that the effect of economic hardship may be consistent across various types of homicide.

More recently, Kovandzic et al. (1999) have argued that two possible reasons why empirical evidence has failed to provide a clear consensus on the relationship between economic inequality, poverty and homicide rates are, first, that the relationship may be time dependent and, second, the nature of the association is contingent on the type of homicide being analyzed (i.e., family, acquaintance, stranger). In their city-level analysis, the authors showed that, while poverty or inequality are associated with all types of homicide, family homicide is more closely associated with socio-economic factors. Thus, it may be that improved economic levels will have a greater impact on family homicides, including spousal killings, than other types of homicides. Analyses that incorporate various measures of the Canadian economy over time to determine their impact on rates of various types of homicide would help clarify this picture generally, and the relationship between the economy and spousal homicide, in particular.

4.4 The role of demography

In the early 1960s, researchers began to focus on the extent to which the demographic structure of the population might be linked to aggregate crime rates. Guiding this research was the assumption that, all else being equal, levels of violence should rise as the proportion of the population in the more violent-prone groups (i.e., age, race, gender) expanded (Fox, 1999). Research conducted during the early 1960s in the United States largely confirmed this association.[42] As a result, it stands to reason that when crime rates begin to fall

[38] The deterrence model of homicide suggests that aggregate homicide rates are a function of two factors – certainty of punishment and severity of punishment (e.g., Gibbs, 1968). The etiological model includes certainty and severity of punishment as well as socio-economic and demographic factors as predictors of homicide rates.

[39] Recent research suggests, however, that the distinction between expressive and instrumental homicide may not be as clear-cut as originally thought. For example, Miethe and Drass (1999) found that the vast majority of homicides involve various factors common to both typologies, thus, they may share some situational contexts. In other words, homicides between intimates may involve both instrumental and expressive characteristics and the same can be said for stranger homicides.

[40] In the United States, the structural poverty index includes the infant mortality rate, percentage of families with less than $1,000 income per month, percentage of children living with one parent, percentage of the population over 25 years of age with less than five years of education and, finally, the percentage of inductees who failed the armed forces mental test.

[41] In the final model, percent urban was also a significant predictor of the non-primary homicide rate and percent aged 20-34 was a significant predictor of the primary homicide rate.

[42] Levels of violence had increased sharply during this period in the United States prompting various researchers to examine how significant shifts in the age, race and sex composition of the population may be contributing to the rise in violence (for a review of this literature, see Fox, 1999).

dramatically, the role of demography might also be part of the explanation.[43]

Rosenfeld (2000) and others (e.g., Blumstein & Wallman, 2000) have suggested that part of the explanation for the adult contribution to the overall decline in homicide is fairly simple. As the baby boomers have moved into adulthood, they have brought down the total rate of homicide and other crimes in the same way that they exerted upward pressure on crime rates in their youth. However, while this may have contributed somewhat to the current declines, researchers acknowledge that it does not offer a full explanation. For example, credible explanations must be able to explain decreases in levels of violence among younger as well as older adults. Further, a close inspection of declining rates of intimate partner homicide are also necessary for assessing the adequacy of explanations for the overall decline in adult homicide rates. With respect to the latter, two factors have been identified: the sex composition of the population and changing relational lifestyles among intimate partners (e.g., declining rate of marriage). The latter will be discussed in more detail in the section on explanations specific to intimate partner homicide.

With respect to the sex-ratio argument, recently Avakeme (1999) applied Guttentag and Secord's (1983) thesis on sex ratios to the lethal victimization of women.[44] He showed that sex ratios were important for understanding female homicide victimization, but not in the way expected. That is, contrary to his hypothesis, high sex ratios (e.g., more men than women) increased the incidence of female homicide victimization and, more specifically, this effect was stronger for White women.[45] One possible interpretation of this finding draws from work by Daly & Wilson (1988) who have argued that it is male proprietariness over women's reproductive capacity that may often lead to the killing of women. Based on this theory, one might expect that, where there are more men than women, female reproductive capacity would be a scarce resource, leading to more proprietary behaviour by males.

In the 1961 Canadian Census, figures showed that there were more men than women living in this country. However, the raw numbers indicate that this difference has diminished since then and, in the 1976 Census, the situation reversed: there were more women then men that year and these numbers have continued to increase.[46] For example, in 1976, there were 93,560 more women then men in Canada. Figures from the most recent census in 1996 indicate that there are now 506,710 more women then men. However, there has been no Canadian research to date that has examined the effect of the relative numbers of women and men on the violent crime rate in this country.

4.5 Changes in policing

Two popular perspectives exist about the police role in the reduction of crime. The first is that police play a minimal role in fighting crime and so the effect of policing on the crime rate is negligible (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Klockars, 1983). Therefore, the number of police officers, the level of police resources, or various policing strategies are not perceived to have much impact on crime rates. This view has been supported by more than two decades of empirical research, documenting little association between policing efforts and crime (see review, Eck & Maguire 2000). However, with recent declines in violent crime in the United States, a second view has become more prominent. Proponents of this view suggest that police presence can reduce (or amplify) criminal activity, depending on the time, the place and the type of policing strategies adopted (Dilulia, 1995; Kelling & Coles, 1996; Sherman, 1995).

In a comprehensive review of the research, however, Eck & Maguire (2000) concluded that there is still no consistent evidence that increased policing leads to reductions in violent crime. In fact, Sherman (1997) argues that more aggressive policing strategies may act to reduce crime in the short-term, but increase crime rates over the long-term.[47] For example, aggressive policing strategies often involve increases in arrest for

[43] Recent research suggests, however, that the problem with the predictions derived from demographic changes is that such hypotheses are based on an assessment of a single variable: the number of people of crime-prone years (Levitt, 1999). In other words, they do not take into account two key things: projected increases in the size of the overall population and age-specific crime rates and changes in these rates.

[44] Guttentag and Secord's (1983) research hypothesizes that the male-female sex ratios (i.e., number of men per 100 women) may have an impact on various social phenomena, including levels of violence. This association has been examined empirically in several studies of violence (Blau & Golden, 1986; Carroll & Jackson, 1983; Crutchfield, Gerrken & Gove, 1982; DeFronzo, 1983; Messner, 1986a, 1986b; Messner & Blau, 1987; Simpson, 1985).

[45] Avakeme (1999) also noted that the association between high sex ratios and the lethal victimization of females was not mediated by female labour force participation, the secondary focus of his analysis.

[46] Despite the changes in raw numbers, however, the sex ratio of men to women in this country continues to average around one, meaning that there are close to equal numbers of men and women.

[47] Related to this, Greene (1999) shows that zero-tolerance policing is no more effective in reducing crime than is its ideological opposite: problem-oriented community policing. In fact, the former strategy creates more tension between police and members of the community and leads to the criminalization of large numbers of people without any apparent benefit (see also Paternoster et al., 1997).

less serious crimes. As a result, problems created by past arrests (i.e., limited opportunities in the legitimate labour market) will affect more people. Thus, aggressive, law-and-order policing strategies may not benefit society over time.

In light of the lack of empirical support for the role of policing in reducing crime rates, Eck and Maguire (2000) have suggested that researchers need to think of police as only one agency in a multitude of institutions, both formal and informal, that respond to crime rather than as an isolated institution that should have its own, distinct impact on crime. They write:

> When violent crime grows into a serious social problem, it is not just the police that focus more attention on the problem. Rather schools, community groups, businesses, health officials, and many other organizations and individuals also respond to crime. Such a response might be likened to a regional reaction to a natural disaster, except it would be spread over a longer period ...When considered in isolation, the effectiveness of any one element of this diverse array of people and organizations may be slight. But collectively, the response might be more dramatic. Because it takes time to mobilize a diverse group of institutions, their collective impact will lag behind rising crime rates. Over time, however, the cumulative effect of these forces becomes more apparent (Eck & Maguire, 2000: 250).

Based on the above, then, changes in policing that have been implemented to respond to the growing concern about domestic violence and, in particular, violence against women, may have had an impact on the incidence of spousal homicide, as part of the broader social movement to address this problem. This argument is similar to the final explanation discussed, that is, that declining rates of violence signify a society whose members are undergoing another "civilizing process." This argument will be discussed below.

4.6 The civilizing process

In the search for explanations for the declining levels of violence, some researchers have pointed to the possibility that society is undergoing another *civilizing process* (e.g., Rosenfeld, 2000). Traditionally, the civilizing process thesis was used to explain the declines in violence in European societies over several centuries (Elias, 1994). In short, this process refers to "evolving cultural sensibilities that define displays of aggressive behaviour as distasteful, unsightly, uncouth, and animalistic" (p.156). Rosenfeld (2000) suggests that a second wave of the civilizing process is currently being experienced in the United States. This wave is represented by society's increasing intolerance for interpersonal violence and, in particular, lethal violence (see also Zimring & Hawkins, 1997). The implementation of zero-tolerance policies in schools, the increasing reliance on incarceration as a means of social control, the popularity of the victims' rights movement and, more important in light of the focus of this discussion, the domestic violence movement, have been noted as examples of this civilizing process.

One way to connect the growing intolerance for interpersonal violence with individual behaviour, particularly with respect to lethal violence, is by drawing from Lundsgaarde's (1977) cultural perspective on homicidal behaviour. In his book, *Murder in Space City*, Lundsgaarde argues that killing, when defined in terms of the victim-offender relationship and the subsequent punishments, can be explained by referring to cultural or normative values that are inherent in society and reflected in its formal legal institutions. That is, the principal link between cultural rules as guidelines for individual behaviour and the actual behaviour itself lies in the sanctioning process (represented by the criminal justice system).

As an example of this, Lundsgaarde draws attention to the way in which homicides that result from unsatisfactory interpersonal relationships (e.g., spousal homicides) have not traditionally been viewed as a threat to the social order – the primary concern of formal sanctioning agencies. As a result, he argues that the rate at which such killings occur is directly related to the level of disapproval (or lack of it) that exists culturally (represented by responses from criminal justice officials). He concludes, then, that homicide, or any form of interpersonal violence, should be viewed as a type of "cultural phenomenon" that can be studied and analyzed by applying general sanctioning theory.

Extending Lundsgaarde's argument to current trends in killing, it may be that the sanctioning process that treats crimes between intimates as more serious in nature (at least, relative to the past) has had a symbolic effect on society that, in combination with responses by other formal and informal agencies, has created a growing intolerance of violence between intimates. Rosenfeld (2000) argues that the domestic violence movement has

been quite successful in gaining recognition for this group of victims:

> The movement sends a clear and potent cultural signal that women have a right to be free from male violence. The full effects of that message on levels of intimate partner violence may extend well beyond the specific reductions associated with hotlines, shelters, restraining orders, and other protective mechanisms the movement has prompted (Rosenfeld, 2000: 159).

4.7 Summary

The above discussion suggests that explanations for declines in homicide, generally, in the United States may, to varying degrees, contribute to our understanding of similar declines in intimate partner homicide. The same may also be true for Canada, but no research to date has systematically examined these issues. At the very least, some of the macro-level factors, briefly touched on above, may contribute in some way to an understanding of both general declines in homicide being experienced in Canada as well as declines in various types of homicide. For example, as noted, gun control legislation has become more stringent in this country, particularly with respect to spousal violence. Furthermore, while our country's imprisonment rate has been declining in recent years, it did grow and peak in 1992 – at about the same time as declines in spousal homicide were first noted.

What impact do these factors have on the rate at which spouses kill each other? While one might expect their effect to be minimal, rigorous analyses should, at the very least, control for some of these factors when attempting to isolate more specific explanations for declining levels of lethal violence between intimates. The next section outlines several factors that have been identified in U.S.-based research as having a potential impact on declines in intimate partner homicide specifically.

5.0 Understanding the Decline in Intimate Partner Homicide: The Role of Exposure Reduction

It has only been within the past decade that research has moved beyond documenting the decline in intimate partner homicide toward identifying factors that may be contributing to this recent trend. The emphasis in this body of research has been on sources of exposure reduction, that is, the factors that decrease the likelihood that violence between intimate partners will occur or continue to occur and, consequently, lead to lethal outcomes (Browne & Williams, 1989; Dugan et al., 1999; Rosenfeld, 2000). Three important social changes have been identified in this literature that coincide with the decline in intimate partner homicide:

- The domestic violence movement;
- Increasing gender socio-economic equality; and,
- The changing nature of intimate relationships.

Again, this research has been conducted exclusively in the United States and so this section relies on U.S.-based research[48], however, Canadian citizens have also witnessed or experienced the social changes identified. As a result, the findings from these studies may have important implications for future research examining this phenomenon in Canada. In this section, various factors perceived to reduce exposure to lethal and non-lethal violence between intimates are discussed. Following this is a summary of various bodies of research that have examined the association between these particular factors (or social changes) and the recent trends in intimate lethal violence. (See also Table 1 in Appendix A.)

5.1 Reducing exposure to violence in intimate relationships

The exposure reduction framework is premised on a consistent and well-documented finding in violence research: Ongoing violence in intimate relationships often precedes intimate partner killings (Browne, 1987; Browne, Williams & Dutton, 1999; Campbell, 1992; Chimbos, 1978; Gartner et al., 1999; Goetting, 1995). Put another way, lethal intimate violence is often the culmination of previously volatile relationships. As a result, mechanisms that help abused partners – primarily women – escape from violent relationships or, ideally, inhibit the development of such relationships in the first place may reduce the rate of lethal victimization among intimate partners (Dugan et al., 1999). While this argument has implications for both the killing of male and female intimate partners, U.S. researchers have noted that decreases have been substantially greater for male victims of lethal violence than for female victims during the period of decline.

To explain the differential decrease in intimate partner homicide for males and females, researchers have drawn attention to a collection of empirical findings that consistently document important motivational and situational differences between men's and women's involvement in homicide (Gartner et al., 1999; Silverman & Kennedy, 1993; Wolfgang, 1958). The first finding is that women are more likely to kill their intimate partners after prolonged abuse and when they fear continued or more serious violence against themselves or their children. Put more simply, victim precipitation is more common in cases that involve women who have killed their male partners whereas this situational characteristic is rare in cases where men kill female partners (Campbell, 1992; Goetting, 1995; Jurik & Winn, 1990; Rasche, 1993; Silverman & Mukherjee, 1987; Wilson & Daly, 1992).[49]

As a result, where services for abused women are available or where women have higher socio-economic status, female victims of abuse may feel they have other more viable options for ending abuse than violence (Dugan et al., 1999). In other words, improved domestic violence resources such as shelters and crisis hotlines and/or greater economic independence may offer some

[48] One possible reason for the paucity of Canadian research examining this issue could stem from the fact that perceived declines in spousal homicide in this country have only been documented since the early 1990s (Fedorowycz, 2000). In contrast, intimate partner homicide rates have been on the decline in the United States for more than two decades (Greenfeld et al., 1998; Puzone et al., 2000; Rennison & Welchans, 2000).

[49] The term "victim precipitation" was first coined by Wolfgang (1958) to describe those violent acts in which the victim makes a direct, positive contribution to his/her own victimization. Typically, this means that the victim was the first to use or threaten to use physical violence against the defendant, to show or to use a deadly weapon or to strike a blow in an altercation.

women an alternative to killing their male partners, thus decreasing the number of men killed in this context.

In contrast, the predominant motive behind the killing of a female by her male intimate partner is the offender's rage or despair over their actual or impending estrangement. Thus, the availability of resources may not hold the same protective potential for women exiting violent relationships because it is often their attempt to leave these relationships that culminates in lethal outcomes (e.g., Browne, Williams & Dutton, 1999; Gartner et al., 1999; Wilson & Daly, 1993). For example, women have been shot down in the very shelters that they had hoped would provide protection from abusive male partners for themselves and often their children (Gartner et al., 1999).

In addition, women are more likely than men to be seriously injured or killed as a result of intimate violence (Berk et al., 1983; Browne, 1993; Crowell & Burgess, 1996; Fagan & Browne, 1994; Stets & Straus, 1990; Stout & Brown, 1995). Therefore, despite the contention by some researchers that women are as likely as their intimate male counterparts to be violent (e.g., Straus & Gelles, 1986), the severity of women's violence toward male partners less often leads to lethal outcomes.

Gender differences, then, in the motives and outcomes of intimate partner violence lead one to expect that improvements in the socio-economic status of women and/or increases in domestic violence resources would have varying impacts on the lethal victimization of male and female intimate partners. Further, the changing nature of intimate relationships (i.e., delayed marriages, fewer legal or formal unions, easier access to divorce) may also mean that women do not feel the need to remain in relationships that pose potential threats to their health and overall well-being. However, their decision to leave such relationships may also be lethal because, as already noted, men often kill female partners when they try to leave them.

The above framework, then, may explain why there have been greater declines in homicides involving male victims than female victims in United States. Recall, however, that a recent Canadian report has suggested declining rates in spousal homicide in this country are greater for female victims than male victims.[50] In the next several sections, the perceived role of these three social changes is described in more detail, as well as the reasons why researchers expect these factors to contribute to declines in spousal or intimate partner homicide. Following this, some of the research that has systematically examined the effect of these variables in reducing exposure to intimate lethal violence will be surveyed and their potential utility in explaining recent trends in intimate violence in Canada will be assessed.

5.2 The role of gender equality in violence against women

During the past few decades, there have been marked improvements in women's socio-economic status and research has identified this as a potential contributing factor to the decline in intimate partner homicide (e.g., Dugan et al., 1999). This view has implications for both the killing of men and the killing of women by their intimate partners. For example, with improved socio-economic status, fewer women may feel trapped in abusive and/or threatening relationships and, as a result, they may be less likely to kill male partners out of desperation or in self-defence. With respect to their own lethality, women's increased economic well-being may provide more access to opportunities and resources that, in turn, help reduce their economic and emotional dependency on men. As a result, women may be less likely to enter into and more likely to exit from unsatisfactory and, often, abusive relationships, decreasing their probability of lethal victimization.

This explanation stems from two bodies of theoretical and empirical research produced in the 1970s and 1980s. The first body of research documents the link between some aspects of socio-economic inequality and rates of homicide and other serious violent crime.[51] The second body of literature encompasses early feminist research that highlighted how gender inequalities might contribute to some forms of violence against women. Empirical evidence, primarily with respect to rape, has provided some support for this assertion.[52] The majority of this work, at least in the United States where much of the research has been conducted, also supports the claim that social inequality contributes to higher rates of violence generally (Land et al., 1990; Parker et al., 1999) and, more specifically, that gender inequality contributes to some forms of violence against women (Bailey & Peterson, 1992).

[50] As discussed earlier, it is not clear if the gender differences in the declining rates are statistically significant. Further research is required to determine the validity of this conclusion.

[51] For reviews, see Messner & Rosenfeld, 1999 and Patterson, 1991; see also Blau & Blau, 1982; Blau & Schwartz, 1984; Blau & Golden, 1986; Braithwaite, 1979; Crutchfield et al., 1982; Golden & Messner, 1987; Land et al., 1990; Parker et al., 1999; Williams & Flewelling, 1988.

[52] For some of this work, see Blau & Blau, 1982; Blau & Golden, 1986; Blau & Schwartz, 1984; Peterson & Bailey, 1988; Baron & Straus, 1989; Peterson & Bailey, 1992; Whaley, 2001.

Traditionally, there are two competing arguments within the body of literature that have examined the association between gender inequality and various forms of violence against women. The first view is that increased gender equality in society will reduce levels of violence against women (e.g., Willam & Holmes, 1981). Sometimes referred to as the ameliorative hypothesis, this perspective argues that where gender inequality is high, rates of violence against women will also be high. Underlying this hypothesis is the assumption that increased educational, occupational, and income levels will provide women with greater protection against lethal and non-lethal victimization.

An alternative argument - generally referred to as the backlash hypothesis - draws attention to the potential negative outcomes that may be associated, initially, with greater levels of gender equality (e.g., Russell, 1975). Proponents of this view argue that any protection produced by women's increased socio-economic status may be counterbalanced by negative reactions - primarily from men - to increasing gender equality. Simply put, women's increased socio-economic status may leave men feeling that their privileged position is being threatened and, as a result, women may experience increases in violent victimization from males who want to maintain their status quo. It has been suggested, however, that the backlash effect will ebb over time as gender equality becomes more normative in society.

Within this body of literature, it is further theorized that the impact of increasing gender equality may not be uniform across all intimate partner relationships nor will it only affect female lethal victimization. For example, men and women who are married are often bound by legal and financial concerns as well as childcare responsibilities. The existence of such ties may act to restrict the ability of some married women to use their increased status to exit or avoid potentially threatening relationships, especially with former husbands (e.g., child visitation rights). As a result, increased gender equality, measured by women's socio-economic status, may be more strongly linked to decreases in the lethal victimization of non-marital intimate partners compared to marital partners (Dugan et al., 1999). Moreover, because research has shown that women's violence toward male partners is often reactive, there may be corresponding increases/decreases in women's violence against men, depending on how gender equality affects levels of male violence toward female intimate partners (Whaley & Messner, 2000).

Much of the empirical research that contributes to our understanding of the association between gender equality and violence against women has focused on rape, but various studies conducted during the past decade have included measures of gender equality and focused on homicide victimization rates as the dependent variable (Bailey & Peterson, 1995; Dugan et al., 1999; Whaley & Messner, 2000). Analyses have focused on whether lethal violence against women has increased generally (reducing the gender gap in homicide) and, more specifically, whether lethal violence between intimate partners has increased, primarily with respect to female lethal victimization.

Differences in analytic techniques, sources of data, time periods covered, and research questions preclude accurate comparisons across studies and make general conclusions about their findings difficult. For illustrative purposes, however, it will be explained below what some of these studies demonstrate about gender stratification and female homicide rates generally and, more specifically, about the relationship between intimate partner homicide and gender inequality. Some tentative conclusions about the association between gender equality and lethal victimization are highlighted (see Table 1 in Appendix A for a summary of these studies).

5.3 What research shows about the relationship between gender equality and homicide

Four dimensions dominate the literature on gender equality and homicide: education, employment, occupation and income levels.[53] Both absolute levels in female achievement as well as the relative status of females compared to males are examined. With regard to the absolute status of women, the basic hypothesis is that those females who have achieved higher educational, occupational, employment and income levels are better protected against victimization (Bailey & Peterson, 1995). On the other hand, the rationale underlying the examination of the role played by women's status relative to men is that, if the subordinate status of women relative to men contributes to female victimization, then the male-female gap in socio-economic status may be more important than the absolute status of women in society (Bailey & Peterson, 1995).

[53] These variables have been cited as conventional, multidimensional indicators of gender socio-economic inequality (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1978).

Empirical support for the importance of relative over absolute socio-economic status was demonstrated in a comprehensive study of the role played by gender stratification in the lethal victimization of females. In short, Bailey and Peterson (1995) found no support for the absolute status of women using objective indicators of education, income, occupation and employment. In contrast, some measures of women's relative status in society were significantly associated with the lethal victimization rates of wives. For example, in cities where women had achieved lower levels of education than men and where women had higher levels of unemployment than their male counterparts, the rate at which women were killed by their husbands was significantly higher, providing indirect support for the ameliorative hypothesis (Bailey & Peterson, 1995: 202).

In contrast, Whaley and Messner (2000) found that increasing parity in male and female socio-economic status leads to increases, not only in the rate of female lethal victimization, but also for males, providing some support for the backlash hypothesis. Recall that these authors speculated that if women's violence is reactive to men's violence, then increases in male aggression should produce corresponding increases in female aggression against intimate partners. Finally, in another city-level study using similar measures, Brewer and Smith (1995) failed to find any support for the association between gender equality and male or female homicide rates. In fact, they found that a model including traditional social-structural variables[54] was neither altered nor enhanced by the inclusion of the gender equality variables. Moreover, they found that no single variable measuring the relative status of women was significantly associated with female or male homicide rates.

Earlier research by Gartner and her colleagues (1990a, 1990b, 1991), however, highlights the importance of societal norms surrounding female status in understanding the relationship between gender equality and violence against women. In addition, this work emphasizes how the time period being examined is also important. In short, they highlight the inability of cross-sectional research to capture changing social conditions that appear to have an important impact on the association between women's socio-economic status and lethal victimization. For example, examining the gender gap in homicide in 18 countries over time, Gartner (1990) found that labour force participation did lead to higher rates of homicide for females generally. In a later study, Gartner et al. (1990) explicated this relationship somewhat. Using the female share of enrolment in higher education as an indicator of female status, Gartner et al. (1990) found that in countries where female status was high, women's adoption of less traditional labour force and domestic roles did not lead to higher rates of victimization. In contrast, where women's status was low, the gender gap in homicide was narrower, meaning that women became more vulnerable to lethal victimization. The authors concluded, then, that the normative status of females in a society appears to condition the association between gender equality and lethal victimization. As such, in countries where gender equality was more normative, women who participated in non-traditional roles were not at greater risk of lethal victimization than women who did not participate in these roles.

The importance of time in the examination of gender equality and homicide risk is emphasized in a Canadian study by Gartner and McCarthy (1991) in which 670 cases of femicide were examined in two cities from 1921-1990. Examining both total femicide rates and disaggregated rates (spousal versus non-intimate femicide), the authors found that employment status was positively associated with rates of femicide generally and, more specifically, of spousal femicide *only* in the early period. More specifically, prior to 1970, women who were employed were at a greater risk of lethal victimization than women who were not employed. This risk diminished in the later period. This appears to provide some support for the hypothesis that any backlash from increased gender equality will ebb over time.

The conditioning effects of location and time as well as other characteristics such as race and type of intimate partner relationship have been underscored by more recent work (Avakeme, 1999; Dugan et al., 1999; Gauthier & Bankston, 1997). For example, Avakeme (1999) found that female labour force participation increased female homicide rates for some women more than others. For example, White women were at greater risk of lethal victimization as a result of labour force participation than minority women. In another study, Gauthier and Bankson (1997) found that women's employment relative to men was negatively related to the sex ratio of spousal killings in high socio-economic cities only.[55] In other words, in cities where women

[54] In this study, social structural variables included population size, population density, resource deprivation, percent of population aged 15-29, percent divorced/separated, percent unemployed and a regional variable designating southern or non-southern states.

[55] The sex ratio of spouse killings (SROK) is defined as the number of women who kill their husbands per 100 men who kill their wives (Daly & Wilson, 1988).

experienced relatively high economic advantage compared to men, the sex ratio of spouse killings tended to be biased in favour of males as killers, supporting the backlash hypothesis. Finally, Dugan et al. (1999) found that women's increased educational levels were associated with a decrease in the lethal victimization of unmarried males, but had no significant effect on the lethal victimization of women.

In summary, then, while it is difficult to make comparisons between studies that differ according to a number of criteria, one might tentatively conclude that the majority of significant findings support the backlash hypothesis, at least under certain conditions. That is, increases in gender equality are often accompanied by increases in female homicide rates, particularly among intimate partners. However, the positive association between increasing gender equality and female lethal victimization has been shown to be conditional on a variety of factors, including female societal status, and may diminish over time. Further research is needed, though, before anything but tentative conclusions can be made. In particular, individual-level analyses would help clarify some of these relationships (e.g., Gartner & Macmillan, 1999). This issue will be discussed further in the section on methodological limitations.

5.4 Resource availability and the likelihood of intimate partner homicide

Research has also suggested that improved legal and extra-legal services for abused women may have contributed to the decline in intimate partner homicide because such services enable women to get help or to exit from abusive relationships (Browne et al., 1989, Dugan et al., 1999). In the United States, improvements in domestic violence services and legislation have coincided with the decline in intimate partner homicide. Similarly, in Canada, there have been some parallels between program and legislative initiatives and the apparent declining rates of spousal violence.

Before the 1970s, police and criminal justice decision makers responded with ambivalence to intimate partner violence. Adhering to a long-standing belief that violence in the home was a private matter, legal actors were reluctant to interfere in violent disputes among intimates and other family members. At about the same time, organizations dedicated to providing services to victims of intimate violence began to emerge as an outgrowth of the battered women's movement (Schechter, 1982). The impetus for this was, in part, the law's inertia in responding to what was increasingly perceived as a serious social problem. Over a period of time, the interests and concerns of feminists and victim advocates and, later, politicians and other government officials prompted a series of reforms. Since then, countless agencies and programs have been developed to address the negative effects of intimate violence and, more specifically, violence against women and children. The impact of these domestic violence resources on lethal and non-lethal violence among intimates, however, has received surprisingly little attention from researchers despite the numerous implications for policy initiatives.

In the past decade, however, some U.S.-based research has begun to assess the effect of these legal and extra-legal resources on the likelihood of lethal violence between intimate partners. Browne and Williams (1989) were the first to examine this issue, focusing on the effects of domestic violence resources on the likelihood of female-perpetrated homicide at the state level. They hypothesized that the rate at which women killed their male partners should decrease as more avenues of escape or legal protection were provided such as funding for shelters, crisis lines and legal aid. To support their argument, Browne and Williams (1989) highlighted the parallel trends in the rate at which women were killing their male partners and the increase in legal and extra-legal resources for abused women in most of the 50 states.

Using U.S. Supplementary Homicide Report data, they examined the intimate partner homicide rate (including married, unmarried and ex-partners) during two time periods - 1976 to 1979 and 1980 to 1984 - perceived to vary in the type and amount of domestic violence resources that were available. They found that the availability of resources was associated with a dramatic decline in the rate at which women killed their male partners, but with only a slight decrease in the rate at which men killed female partners. They also noted that it was the availability of shelters and crisis lines that had the strongest impact on these declines. Browne and Williams argued, then, that some domestic violence services appeared to be providing more protection for male victims of intimate partner violence than for female victims. Given the recognized link between male violence and female-perpetrated homicides, they speculated that women's knowledge or awareness of the resources available for their protection might act to prevent some homicides, especially those that arise out of women's desperation or in self-defence. Moreover, the authors also theorized that the symbolic presence of these resources might act to validate victims' beliefs about the seriousness of their situations, providing them with the motivation to end the abuse.

In a later analysis building on their initial study, Browne and Williams (1993) disaggregated intimate partner homicides by type of intimate relationship to determine if trends were uniform for married and unmarried couples.[56] Examining a longer time period - 1976 to 1987 - the authors found that homicides involving unmarried couples followed a very different pattern than those involving married couples. Similar to the first study, homicide rates between marital couples declined, but again the drop in husband killings was much greater than the drop in wife killings (see also Mercy & Saltzman, 1989). In contrast, the rate at which unmarried women were killed by intimate partners actually *increased* during this period while unmarried men's lethal victimization showed no particular trend. The authors theorized that the increase in lethality for unmarried females might, in part, stem from the fact that societal interventions have been targeted primarily toward women and men in formal or marriage-like (i.e., common-law) relationships. In contrast, few services are available specifically for unmarried couples. Browne et al. (1999) confirm that more recent trends - 1980 to 1995 - continue to show similar patterns for married and unmarried couples.

Two features of the above analyses require caution in the interpretation of these findings (Dugan et al., 1999). First, in all the analyses, Browne and her colleagues (1989, 1993, 1999) used American states as their unit of observation and, while domestic violence legislation is often passed at the state level, the actual policies are more often implemented at the local level. In addition, domestic violence services are often concentrated in larger, more urban areas. Furthermore, this early work examined only cross-sectional variation in available services. It may be, however, that longitudinal analyses will show different effects over time between declining rates of lethal violence and changes in the services and resources available to abused intimates.

In response to these limitations, Dugan et al. (1999) examined the relationship between various exposure-reducing factors, including domestic violence resources, and the decline in intimate partner homicide at the city-level over time. Focusing on four types of domestic violence services - hotlines, shelters, legal advocacy and counselling - the authors attempted to isolate the distinct impact of each type of service on changes in the rate of intimate partner homicide. Generally, the authors hypothesized that the availability of domestic violence resources would be associated with decreases in intimate partner homicide, but the effects would be greater for males and married couples (including common-law relationships).

Providing partial support for the earlier findings by Browne and Williams (1989), Dugan et al. (1999) identified a significantly stable and negative impact of hotlines and legal services on the rate at which wives killed their husbands. There was no significant impact, however, of the number of shelter beds available, contrary to earlier findings. Counselling services were found to be positively and significantly associated with the lethal victimization rate of both married males and unmarried females. In other words, this type of domestic violence resource did not reduce exposure to violence for these two groups. Dugan et al. (1999) suggest caution, however, when interpreting this finding because counselling can encompass a variety of services and future research should account for such differences.[57]

In summary, despite the proliferation of domestic violence services during the past few decades, little research has actually examined the role these resources - both legal and extra-legal - have played in the move to reduce violence among intimates and, in particular, violence against women by male partners. Based on the limited research available, though, it appears that the domestic violence movement and the resulting initiatives have provided more protection for men than women. Research has yet to be conducted in Canada to systematically assess the effects of program and policy changes on the incidence and prevalence of intimate violence in this country. Such research would provide an interesting contrast to the U.S.-based research since spousal homicide rates for women are perceived to be declining faster than for men in Canada, a situation not reflected south of the border. It should be noted that, despite the greater protection such services appear to be providing for male victims, the utility of these programs or measures is not diminished in any way. It does mean, though, that research needs to identify mechanisms that will offer more protection for female victims. This issue will be discussed in the section on future research.

[56] Legal marriages, common-law unions and ex-married partners were included in the marital category while the unmarried category included those who were or had been dating or living with their partners (but not long enough to be considered common-law).

[57] The authors also indicated that they were sceptical of the positive effects found for counselling for statistical reasons. That is, even with controls for time and place, the correlations of the service variables were quite large, especially between hotlines and counselling ($r = .732$). As a result, they suggest that some of the results for the individual-level service variables may be artefacts of multicollinearity.

5.5 The changing nature of intimate relationships

The changing nature of intimate relationships has been identified as a third factor that may be contributing to declines in intimate partner homicide, at least in the United States (Browne et al., 1993; Dugan et al., 1999; Rosenfeld, 2000). During the past few decades, both males and females have increasingly delayed entry into first marriage or remarriage. Instead, many couples are opting to live together as unmarried couples or to maintain boyfriend/girlfriend or dating relationships for longer periods of time. In the United States, this steady decline in the rate of marriage has been particularly noticeable among young adults - aged 20 to 29 - the age group at highest risk of lethal victimization (Dugan et al., 1999; Rosenfeld, 1997; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998).

As a result of these changes in intimate unions, researchers have speculated that the decreasing popularity of marriage has contributed, to some extent, to the reduction in intimate partner killings. According to this argument, falling marriage rates have reduced the number of opportunities for intimate partner homicides (Rosenfeld, 2000). The fact that documented declines in intimate partner homicide have been shown to be greater for marital partners than non-marital intimate partners appears to support this contention.[58] Similarly, it has been argued that delayed first marriages may indicate greater selectivity among would-be spouses thereby reducing the proportion of violent relationships among intact marriages (Dugan et al., 1999; Rosenfeld, 2000).

Rosenfeld (1997) was the first to highlight the possible role of declining marriage rates in his study of intimate partner homicide over a 25-year period in St. Louis, Missouri. Based on his analysis, he concluded that approximately 30% of the decline in spousal homicides among African Americans during this period was attributable to declining "domesticity," a term used to denote long-term intimate relationships (see also Gillis, 1986). He concluded that falling marriage rates and rising rates of separation and divorce among this subgroup of the population contributed the most to decreases in intimate partner homicide. Recall that it is among African-Americans, especially males, for which the most pronounced declines in intimate partner homicides have been documented in the United States. Rosenfeld concluded that the role played by declining marriage rates today may be similar to the role played by divorce in earlier periods when increasing divorce rates acted as a safety valve that contributed to declines in domestic homicide (see also Gillis, 1996).

As part of their larger analysis of the effect of various exposure-reduction factors, Dugan et al. (1999) also estimated the impact of domesticity on the change in intimate partner homicide rates across 29 U.S. cities over time. Their study demonstrated that domesticity was related to the rate of spousal homicide: The higher the marriage rate, the higher the rates of both husband- and wife-perpetrated marital homicide. In addition, high divorce rates reduced the rate at which wives killed husbands but not vice versa. The authors also found evidence of a substitution effect[59]: declining marital domesticity, measured by divorce rates, was associated with an increase in the rate of unmarried males killing their partners. Overall, then, the authors concluded that declining domesticity had a greater impact on declining rates of male victimization than female victimization.

More recently, Rosenfeld (2000) demonstrated that the effects of declining marriage rates on intimate partner homicide were different for specific age groups. For example, falling rates of marriage had a substantial impact on lethal killings between couples aged 20-29, but not for older couples aged 30-44. Among the younger couples, the drop in marriage explained about one-half of the decline in spousal homicide for Black men, 43% for White men, 51% for Black women, and 65% for White women (Rosenfeld, 2000: 156). To explain the lack of association between falling marriage rates and killings between older couples, Rosenfeld (2000) draws attention to age-specific rates of population growth. In short, while marriage rates have declined for all ages, decreases are not sufficient to offset simultaneous increases in the number of married, middle-aged adults among the baby-boom cohorts. Rosenfeld (2000) suggests, then, that declines in spousal homicide between older couples may be better explained by

[58] Early analyses of intimate partner homicide rates in the United States, from 1976-1987, showed that while the homicide rate for marital partners declined somewhat during this period, different patterns were evident for non-marital intimate partners. That is, the lethal victimization of men in unmarried, intimate relationships showed no clear trend whereas the homicide rate for unmarried women in intimate relationships increased significantly (see Browne & Williams, 1993). Later analyses by the same authors showed that marital homicides continued to decline from 1980-1995 and a slight decline began for unmarried intimate partners (see Browne et al., 1999).

[59] The authors tested for the possibility that a decrease in marital domesticity would result in increases in non-marital domesticity by including the marriage and divorce rate variables in the statistical model for non-married intimate partner homicides. They hypothesized that if there was a substitution effect, falling marriage rates should produce increases in homicides between non-marital partners. Moreover, higher divorce rates should result in higher lethal victimization rates among unmarried intimate male and female partners.

focusing on other social changes like increases in the availability of domestic violence services and improvements in women's economic status, as discussed above.

On the surface, the "declining domesticity" argument seems plausible, however, there are a number of problems with this explanation. First, this argument is based on the assumption that in order to be a victim of intimate partner homicide, one must be married or intimately involved with another person. And, while it is logical to assume that falling marriage rates will reduce the number of marital partners at risk of lethal violence, it does not follow that it will reduce the number of intimate partners at risk generally. In short, falling marriage rates do not mean that men and women are not becoming intimate; rather it simply means that other types of intimate relationships are increasing. Researchers acknowledge that the decline in formal marriage is likely to be offset to some extent by increases in the rate at which couples live together or maintain other types of intimate unions, but they argue that non-marital unions are far less stable. For example, in the United States, non-marital cohabiting relationships do not last long; about 50% end in less than two years (Levitan, Belous & Gallo, 1988). Similarly, in Canada, beginning conjugal life through common-law relationships nearly doubles the likelihood of separation (Le Bourdais et al., 2000).

The validity of this argument is not clear, however, because two well-documented facts muddy the picture somewhat. First, estrangement is a risk factor for intimate partner homicide, thus, one might expect that a higher rate of break-ups would lead to more, not less, violence. Furthermore, the positive association between divorce rates and lethal victimization of both males and females has been consistently documented in aggregate-level studies (Parker, McCall & Land, 1999).[60] However, in the case of intimate partner homicide, it appears to be providing a protective component against violence.

The domesticity argument becomes more complex when definitions used to calculate rates of marital and non-marital homicide are examined. For example, much of the U.S.-based research categorizes legal and common-law unions, both current and former, in the category of marital homicide. Based on the declining domesticity argument, falling marriage rates and rising divorce rates lead to less opportunity to victimize an intimate partner. At the same time, this research also suggests that what is replacing marriage are cohabiting (i.e., common-law) relationships that are shorter in duration than legal marriages and less stable, leading to more frequent break-ups of intimate unions. Again, based on consistently documented findings regarding risk factors associated with intimate partner homicide, one would expect that the displacement of marriage by less stable and more volatile unions would lead to increases in violence rather than decreases. That is, common-law status and estrangement are risk factors for intimate partner homicide, however, both these relationship types are categorized in the marital category, precluding an examination of this issue (see exception, Puzone et al., 2000).

Finally, Rosenfeld (2000) acknowledges that reliable trend data are not available for the non-marital category (i.e., boyfriend/girlfriend relationships). As a result, it is difficult to determine accurately whether the rate of non-marital intimate partner homicide is rising or falling. While the number of such killings has risen slightly over the last 20 years, it follows from the declining domesticity argument, that the number of these relationships has risen as well.[61]

Despite these methodological problems, it is an intriguing question: Have changing relational lifestyles led to decreases in violence between intimates and, in particular, lethal violence? This question is relevant to the situation in this country because Canada has been witnessing similar changes in the structure of intimate relationships. While legal marriages still represent the majority of unions in this country, such formal relationships no longer hold the ubiquitous appeal they once did. As a result, there has been an increase in less formal, cohabiting or common-law relationships. For example, examining data from the 1995 Canadian General Social Survey, Le Bourdais et al. (2000) found that women and men are increasingly living in common-law relationships over legal marriage. In fact, similar to the United States, common-law unions have become the most popular arrangement for a first conjugal relationship among younger couples in Canada.

However, similar to the situation south of the border, official data on numbers of ex-common-law relationships or boyfriend/girlfriend relationships are

[60] Much of the aggregate research is cross-sectional in nature, however. Thus, it is possible that cross-sectional and longitudinal relationships between divorce and homicide differ.

[61] Rosenfeld later indicated that relatively reliable trend data for boyfriend/girlfriend relationships are possible by using the percentage of the population that is 15 years and older in the single, never-married category (Rosenfeld, personal communication, 2001).

not easily accessible or have not been gathered for a long period of time. Thus, it is difficult to determine whether there have been increases or decreases in intimate partner homicides involving these unions. It may be that the focus on declines in spousal homicides masks continuing high rates of violence among other couples who were intimates, but not legally married when the killing occurred. These issues will be examined in more detail in the section on methodological limitations.

5.6 Summary

During the past decade, researchers in the United States have examined several factors that may be contributing to the declines in intimate partner homicide. The primary factors or conditions identified to date are increased gender equality, enhanced availability of non-lethal alternatives to avoid or exit violent relationships, and changing relational lifestyles. There is some initial empirical support for the role played by the increased availability of options for exiting abusive relationships in reducing the number of partner homicides, at least in the United States where this research has been conducted. However, it is a paradoxical situation: Policy initiatives meant to aid women who are being threatened or assaulted by their male intimate partners may have actually contributed to declines in male lethal victimization rates more than female rates (Browne & Williams, 1989; Duggan et al., 1999). In short, the availability of such resources appears to provide non-violent alternatives for victims of male partner abuse, but little protection for women at risk of lethal victimization at the hands of male intimate partners.[62]

There is also partial support for the relationship between changing relational styles and rates of intimate partner homicide. There has been a shift in the people who marry - the population of persons who marry is older than it was 20 years ago and this might help explain the overall decrease in homicide rates. In other words, this age shift may contribute to declines in total rates of spousal homicide victimization by reducing the size of the population at highest risk of spousal homicide - those couples aged 20 to 29 (Rosenfeld, 1997). However, as discussed, this explanation is problematic because of the inclusion of various types of relationships in the marital category. In addition, difficulties arise in trying to accurately assess whether killings have increased or decreased among ex-common-law partners, dating couples or boyfriend/girlfriend relationships.

Finally, broadly speaking, some empirical findings about the association between gender equality and lethal violence against women support both the ameliorative (e.g., Bailey & Peterson, 1995) and the backlash hypotheses (e.g., Whaley & Messner, 2000) while other findings observe no association between gender equality and female homicide rates (e.g., Brewer & Smith, 1995). Moreover, gender equality has also been shown to contribute to declines in killings of men by their intimate partners (Dugan et al., 1999). In addition, studies have demonstrated that increased social and economic opportunities may decrease the risk of being a victim of partner homicide for some women and increase the risk for other women. Thus, the relationship between gender equality and intimate partner homicide is not clear and, at the very least, it is not a simple one. It can be tentatively concluded, however, that the backlash hypothesis is supported to some degree, at least under particular conditions. This association requires further research.

Below, some of the limitations of current research on declining rates of spousal or intimate partner homicide are highlighted. In the last section, some avenues for future research examining this phenomenon are examined.

[62] Moreover, the resource availability hypothesis cannot explain the finding, in the United States, that rates of intimate partner homicide declined at a much faster rate for Black women than for White women. There is evidence that during the past 20 years, services have been unavailable, inaccessible or culturally inappropriate for some women of colour (Richie, 1996; Schechter, 1982).

6.0 Limitations of the Research

Examining trends or patterns in crime (and other social phenomena) has long been a focus of social science research. Traditionally, this work has focused on calculating aggregate levels in crime and, more particularly, violent crime. More recently, researchers have begun to recognize the utility of examining trends within and between nations that vary by particular characteristics of the population (i.e., age, gender). This work has contributed to a better understanding of crime rate patterns and the factors that drive these patterns. In the latter part of this century, North America has witnessed a steady decline in violence. In the last decade, particularly, there have been dramatic decreases in the violent crime rate and, in particular, homicide. Despite a flurry of research activity, predominantly in the United States, no single factor has been identified as contributing to these declines. In fact, most researchers agree that no one factor appears to be the cause, rather it is believed that a combination of factors has lead to recent trends. Moreover, it is recognized that the overall decline in homicide is the result of significant declines in various population subgroups (Blumstein & Wallman, 2000).

The purpose of this paper was to document what is known to date about declines in lethal violence for one of these subgroups: intimate partners or spouses. Research examining recent trends of this phenomenon is still relatively new and, thus, some methodological and conceptual limitations prevent anything more than tentative conclusions from being drawn. The bulk of the research that has examined trends in intimate partner homicide or attempted to identify factors that are or have been contributing to declining rates in this type of homicide has been conducted primarily in the United States. As a result, the discussion below, highlighting some of the theoretical and methodological limitations of this research, stems primarily from an examination of those U.S.-based studies described above. Where applicable, similar problems with Canadian research are discussed. The first several sections discuss difficulties surrounding the documentation of declines in spousal or intimate partner homicide. The following section discusses research that has attempted to explain these declines.

6.1 Documenting declines

Defining spousal or intimate partner homicide

A troublesome issue inherent in homicide research is that there is no consistent use of definitions across studies for the various types of victim-offender relationships examined (Zahn & McCall, 1999). This poses particular problems when documenting trends in specific types of homicide over time (i.e., acquaintance, family) and for comparing rates at one point in time. Most important for this discussion is that researchers may also vary in how they define intimate partner relationships. For example, some Canadian research has focused specifically on rates of homicide between husbands and wives (Daly & Wilson, 1988; Fedorowycz, 2000) while other researchers use a broader definition, encompassing killings that occur in dating relationships or between boyfriends, girlfriends, or lovers (Gartner et al., 1999; Silverman & Kennedy, 1993). The following example compares findings from two different studies to best illustrate the problem that arises through the use of varying definitions.

The most recent statistics from the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics indicate that spousal homicides have been on the decline in Canada since the early 1990s. Here, "spousal" is defined as those relationships that "include persons in registered marriages, in common-law relationships and persons separated or divorced from such unions" (Fedorowycz, 2000: 10). In contrast, research by Silverman and Kennedy (1993) has noted that spousal homicides have been decreasing in Canada since the early 1960s. They use a broader definition of "spousal" to include "legal marriages, common-law marriages, separations, divorces, and people living together, these arrangements are combined with a category called 'lovers'" (p. 69).[63] So, have spousal homicides been declining for the past decade or the past three decades?[64]

[63] Silverman & Kennedy (1993) also use data from the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, however, they included a larger number of the 30-plus victim-offender relationship categories available to construct a "spousal relationship" category. They acknowledge that this categorization is still restricted, but imposed by those who design the data-collection techniques.

[64] It is interesting to note that when a broader definition of intimate partner relationships is incorporated, Canadian trends more closely resemble trends documented in the United States where a broader definition is also used. In other words, in both countries, the rate at which intimate partners kill each other has been declining for more than two decades (see Greenfeld, 1998; Puzone et al., 2000).

Furthermore, inconsistent definitions pose problems at a more specific level when documenting trends for different types of intimate partner relationships. For example, what distinguishes common-law partners from long-term dating or boyfriend/girlfriend relationships? One study in the United States documented trends for homicides occurring between marital and non-marital intimate partners (Browne et al., 1999). The definition adopted for non-marital intimate partners was "those individuals who were or had been dating or living periodically with each other but did not meet the general criteria of common-law marriage" (p. 155). What is that general criteria? Is it consistent across states and studies? The quick answer to this question would be "no" as there is no official definition of "common-law" status at the national level or in most states.[65] Moreover, what distinguishes current and former intimate partner relationships? Does separation for a day, a week, a month constitute a former intimate partner relationship?

Even if researchers began to adopt more consistent and broadly used definitions for intimate partner relationship categories (or relationship categories generally), definitional problems remain because researchers rely primarily on police descriptions of victim-offender relationships that are made at the time of the incident (for a discussion of this issue more generally, see Decker, 1993; Flewelling & Williams, 1999). To address definitional inconsistencies, then, new ways to collect information on victim-offender relationship need to be incorporated. Or, at the very least, researchers need to go beyond police designations of such categories and use multiple sources of information to determine the exact nature of these relationships. Such measures would also help address a related problem discussed next.

Disaggregating trends in intimate partner homicide

Overall trends for intimate partner homicide have been consistently documented. Research suggests, however, that aggregate rates highlighting these declines may, at the same time, obscure how rates of some types of intimate partner homicide have remained stable or are, in fact, increasing (Browne et al., 1999). In the United States, for example, research that has documented trends in partner homicide has revealed different patterns by gender, by type of relationship or a combination of both (e.g., Dugan et al., 1999; Puzone et al., 2000). Most research now commonly disaggregates rates by gender when examining patterns in intimate partner homicide, but less frequently do analyses disaggregate these rates by type of relationship or a combination of gender and relationship type.

Such analyses are rare despite a growing body of research that suggests that the type of relationship may increase or decrease the risk of death or serious injury between intimates (Daly & Wilson, 1988; Gartner et al., 1999; Silverman & Mukherjee, 1987; Wilson & Daly, 1995). For example, as already discussed, it is increasingly recognized that common-law couples and those couples who are estranged are at a higher risk of intimate partner homicide; the latter is a particularly risky situation for women. Below, these risk factors are briefly discussed, highlighting data collection problems that often preclude a more specific examination of these relationships. This is followed by a discussion of three studies that have disaggregated rates by gender and relationship type and what they demonstrated.

The case of common-law unions. As discussed above, both men and women in common-law relationships are at a greater risk of both lethal and non-lethal violence than couples in other types of relationships (Gartner et al., 1999; Rodriguez & Henderson, 1995; Wilson et al., 1993). For example, in the Ontario study of intimate femicide, Gartner et al. (1999) demonstrated that, during the period from 1991 to 1994, the rate of intimate femicide for women in common-law unions was approximately six times greater than the average rate of intimate femicide in Ontario. Similarly, research has also demonstrated that the characteristics of homicides and the people involved may vary by type of intimate partner relationship. For example, compared to offenders who kill legal spouses, offenders who kill common-law partners have been shown to be younger, more likely to have criminal records, and less likely to have children (Dawson & Gartner, 1998).

In short, research demonstrates that common-law offenders have particular characteristics that make them especially prone to violence (e.g., youth, alcohol abuse, socio-economic status) (see also Johnson, 1996; Stets, 1991). The combination of these factors appears to produce more aggressive tendencies in common-law couples than among married couples. As a result, a search for factors that contribute to declines in intimate partner homicide needs to first isolate whether declines are uniform across all relationship types and, in particular, for those relationships that have been shown to be at greater risk of lethal violence.

[65] Personal communication with Dr. Richard Rosenfeld, University of Missouri-St. Louis, a researcher examining these issues in the United States.

The case of estrangement. As already noted above, estrangement has been documented as a risk factor for female victims of intimate partner homicide. This fact draws attention to the faulty logic behind the popular response to a woman's death at the hands of a male partner, "Why didn't she just leave?" This question fails to recognize that a woman's risk of being killed often increases if she leaves or threatens to leave her male partner (Bachman & Saltzman, 1995; Campbell, 1992; Gartner et al., 1999; Wallace, 1986; Wilson & Daly, 1993).[66] Rather than diffusing a potentially threatening situation, research has shown that separation or estrangement (whether actual or only attempted) by a female intimate partner is perceived as an extreme public challenge to the male partner who believes he owns his partner and, thus, has the right to control her (Daly & Wilson, 1988; Ellis & DeKeseredy, 1997). In fact, Mahoney (1991) has suggested the term "separation assault" be used to increase the public's understanding of the termination of an intimate relationship as the period of highest risk and danger for women.

Again, it is difficult to calculate rates of estrangement when data on separation in the general population is available only for legally married couples. No data are available for estrangement among common-law partners or boyfriends and girlfriends. This is particularly relevant since these relationships are generally less stable than legal marriages and, thus, the rate of separation or estrangement would be higher. Moreover, research has shown that homicides that occur among estranged couples differ from those that occur among current partners. For example, males who killed estranged partners are often younger, more likely to have criminal records, more likely to shoot their victims, more likely to kill in a public place, in the presence of witnesses and more likely to kill non-marital intimate partners (i.e., girlfriends) (Dawson & Gartner, 1998).

In summary, despite the recognition that both common-law status and estrangement are risk factors for intimate partner homicide, research seldom disaggregates separated or common-law couples; rather most studies include both in the marital category when documenting trends. One exception to this is work by Puzone et al. (2000) on intimate partner homicide trends in the United States that, similar to other U.S. studies, disaggregates trends by race and relationship type. They build on previous work, however, by examining spouses and ex-spouses separately.[67] They demonstrated that the downward trend in homicide rates for ex-spouses parallels that of declining trends for spouses, generally. The authors concluded, then, that combining spouses and ex-spouses is unlikely to alter results. Due to the way in which the rates were calculated in this study, however, conclusions about the utility of examining trends in homicide among estranged relationships should be tentative.

Broadening the definition of intimate partner relationships

As discussed above, more and more couples are choosing a type of intimacy that does not involve legal marriage. The relevance of these changing relational lifestyles for an examination of declining intimate partner homicide rates has already been touched upon. In addition, it was noted that declining marriage rates might also mean that more men and women are choosing to date or maintain boyfriend/girlfriend relationships for longer periods of time. Research on intimate violence has begun to recognize the importance of examining courtship violence (see Makepeace, 1997). Moreover, most U.S.-based research on declining trends in intimate partner homicide now consistently adopts a broader definition of intimate partners to include dating or boyfriend/girlfriend relationships.

In Canada, however, there has been no move in this direction.[68] Our country is also witnessing changes in the way men and women form intimate unions. Thus, research on both lethal and non-lethal violence needs to broaden its focus. Official statistics do exist on killings between those who are dating or who have formed boyfriend/girlfriend relationships. This information needs to be made more readily available to researchers. Such a move is particularly important in light of the perceived declines that have occurred among marital partners. That is, it is easy to become sanguine about the increasing safety of men and women in marital relationships, but that does not mean that all intimate relationships are equally safe.

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[66] Underlying this question is also the belief that leaving an abusive relationship involves only a single decision or action rather than a chain of events (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983; Landenburger, 1989; Walker, 1984).

[67] Ex-spouse includes both divorced and separated couples. Estimates of the annual divorced population were used to calculate homicide rates for homicide victims murdered by their legal or common-law spouse. A more accurate rate could have been calculated using annual estimates of both divorced and separated couples. It is also not clear if common-law relationships are included in these figures.

[68] While information has been gathered on killings that occur between non-marital intimate partners, particularly since 1991, rates are not yet calculated for the broader category of intimate partners. In other words, spousal homicides are still the key focus.

For example, among unmarried partners in the United States, significant declines were *not* noted for females (Puzone et al., 2000) and, in fact, White, unmarried females experienced a significant increase in the rate at which they were killed by boyfriends (Puzone et al., 2000: 419). It has been speculated that two explanations may jointly account for this. First, White women may be more hesitant than Black women in the United States to call the police when abused by male partners (Bachman & Coker, 1995). In addition, domestic violence legislation and services have been directed primarily toward married women, rather than unmarried partners (Browne & Williams, 1993; Browne et al., 1999). More detailed longitudinal analysis is required, however, to understand the underlying causes of this trend. Below, some of the limitations of recent research that has attempted to explain declines in intimate partner homicide are discussed.

6.2 Explaining declines

Methodological concerns

Research that has systematically examined possible explanations for declines in intimate partner homicide is sparse, particularly in Canada. And, while a number of U.S.-based studies have attempted to isolate contributing factors to these current trends, three methodological limitations have precluded conclusions based on this research. First, except for one study that incorporated a longitudinal dimension (Dugan et al., 1999), all of the research to date has been cross-sectional in nature.[69] While cross-sectional research that examines a phenomenon at one point in time can be informative generally, when examining trends and social changes over time, longitudinal research is required. For example, conclusions about the link between the availability of domestic violence services or increasing gender equality and declining rates of intimate partner homicide cannot be made based on cross-sectional research. Thus, to systematically assess the impact of these social changes on intimate partner homicide, researchers need to incorporate analyses that extend over time and track particular changes.

Second, with respect to the unit of observation, much of the U.S.-based research has been macro-level in its focus, either focusing on aggregate national rates and characteristics, or rates and characteristics at the city- or state-level. While this work is important for understanding declines, more micro-level research is also needed. For example, in an individual-level analysis on spousal abuse, Gartner and Macmillan (1999) demonstrated that the impact of a woman's employment on the likelihood of her being a victim of spousal violence was better explained by looking at the dynamics of the relationship she shared with her male partner. In other words, the authors found that an employed woman had a lower risk of spousal abuse if her male partner was employed, but if he was unemployed, her risk increased significantly. Thus, more micro-level analyses may contribute to our understanding of the role played by gender equality in men's and women's intimate relationships. As a further example, the availability of domestic violence services at the macro-level does not necessarily mean the services are uniformly available to all groups or are being accessed at the same rate (see Browne & Williams, 1989). Individual-level analyses would provide some understanding between the actual use of these services and the probability of lethal violence between intimate partners. This will be discussed in more detail in the section on future research.

Finally, a variety of control variables have been included in the studies to date. It is important to continue carefully selecting factors that may be related to increases or decreases in intimate partner homicide and to general declines in violent crime as discussed in a previous section. A failure to adequately specify important controls may lead to erroneous conclusions about what contributes to declines in this phenomenon.

The role of subgroups

Research in the United States has documented contrasting trends in homicide rates across different subgroups in the population. This suggests that a single explanation may not adequately account for changes in the overall rate of homicide. More targeted explanations are required and these frameworks must, in turn, be able to accommodate the important differences in subgroup trends in intimate partner killings. For example, as already discussed above, time trends in intimate partner killings differ in the United States by type of intimate relationship and gender of the victim. More specifically, the decline in the total rate of intimate partner homicide is attributable primarily to a decrease in the rate of marital killings and female-perpetrated events (Browne & Williams, 1993; Dugan et al., 1999; Greenfeld et al., 1998; Rosenfeld, 1997). Moreover, in the United States,

[69] Dugan et al. (1999) is the only U.S.-based study to date that has included a longitudinal dimension to their analysis. They used panel data from 29 U.S. cities for four biannual periods: 1976-1977, 1981-1982, 1986-1987 and 1991-1992.

Blacks experienced a greater decrease in intimate partner homicide than did Whites (e.g., Puzone et al., 2000). What factors explain these variations?

With respect to gender and type of relationship, it may be that Canada will show similar variation across subgroups, but we will have to await analyses that systematically examine such subgroups trends. And, while race statistics are not readily available in this country, we do know that our Aboriginal population is over-represented among homicide victims. It may be that there has been a substantial decline in the rate at which lethal violence occurs among these couples as earlier declines were documented for this group (Moyer, 1992).

7.0 Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

Research documenting the apparent decline in spousal homicide is fairly recent in Canada. As such, at this point, it may be premature to begin systematically examining potential contributing factors to this decline. At the very least, researchers should continue to examine the nature and extent of the decline while, at the same time, assessing possible explanations. This is important because the ability to differentiate between stable trends and temporary fluctuations in violent crime rates (or any social phenomenon for that matter) is crucial to determining the impact of social, legal and criminal justice policies as well as by changing social, economic and demographic conditions (Donohue, 1998).

It is difficult to determine yet if declines in spousal homicide in this country represent a stable trend or a temporary fluctuation. It is true that the rate at which husbands and wives kill each other has declined since the early 1990s in Canada after a peak in 1991. However, in the past three years, rates of spousal homicide have remained relatively stable and, in fact, increased slightly in 1999. Thus, perceived declines really only span a period of five years or so. Is this a decline or a short-term fluctuation? Based on the above discussion, it may be a little early to tell. As a result, the goals of future research examining this phenomena should be two-fold: (1) to continue documenting trends in spousal or intimate partner homicide, and (2) to systematically examine potential factors associated with the patterns identified. A discussion of each of these goals appears below and a number of issues that are important to such a research agenda are outlined.

7.1 Documenting trends across various subgroups

Research conducted in the United States has demonstrated that examining subgroup trends in intimate partner homicide demonstrates that declines, while fairly consistent across all groups, are more dramatic for some groups than others. In Canada, some official statistics suggest that, within the category of spousal homicides, the rate at which wives are killed is declining more rapidly than the rate at which husbands are killed (CCJS, 2000). If this difference does prove to be significant, is this true across all age categories? Are declines uniform for killings that occur among legal spouses, common-law partners or ex-partners? Are these declines being offset, to some extent, by increases in the rate at which non-marital intimate partners kill each other? Are spousal homicides among Aboriginals also on the decline or is this group still at a particularly high risk compared to non-Aboriginal Canadians?

These and various other questions need to be addressed before Canadian citizens can become sanguine about declining rates of intimate partner violence or before researchers can accurately assume that lethal violence between intimate partners is declining. Moreover, any variation in trends across subgroups is crucial to understanding what factors may be contributing to these patterns. First, however, some of the definitional issues discussed in the previous section need to be addressed. That is, researchers need to begin using a consistent definition of intimate partner relationships that takes into account the changing nature of intimacy in our society. Moreover, differential risks posed by some types of intimate unions compared to others need to be examined in more detail. Before this can happen, however, more accurate data collection techniques need to be adopted; the use of multiple sources of information in identifying and cross-validating the relationship between victims and offenders is one possible route.

Furthermore, contrasting declines across various regions in the country or between urban and rural locations is important to understanding what factors may be associated with current trends. Recall that one of the central factors identified by several studies in the United States as possibly contributing to declines in intimate partner homicide was the increased availability of domestic violence resources. However, the availability of these services varies by location; that is, they are not equally available to all residents in a country. For example, in Canada, urban areas may have more of these resources (i.e., shelter beds or hotlines) available than rural areas. Related to this, it has been suggested that it is the big cities that are contributing disproportionately to the declines. It may be, then, that the rate at which spouses kill each other in rural areas or locations is not actually declining. Such a finding would have pertinent policy implications. Moreover, some regions of the country may be more progressive in

implementing such services or enforcing the various pieces of domestic violence legislation that have been passed in recent years. Thus, it is important to determine, when assessing the role of these resources, whether declines are more evident in areas that have more domestic violence resources than other areas. To do so, aggregate rates need to be disaggregated to highlight both regional and urban/rural trends.

7.2 Explaining Declines

Based on research in the United States, it is generally agreed that no single factor can be identified as the cause of the recent declines in homicides, generally, or declines in intimate partner homicide (Blumstein & Wallman, 2000). Rather the explanation appears to involve a number of variables that contribute in varying degrees to an overall understanding of these declines. No research to date has systematically examined potential explanations for the recent trends in spousal homicide in Canada. Thus, the agenda for future research is wide open.

As a starting point, Canadian researchers could assess the relevance of some of the factors identified by U.S. research to the declines witnessed in this country. This is a crucial first step because, as discussed, many of the social changes in the United States thought to have had an impact on the rate of intimate partner killings have been experienced in this country as well. That is, during the past several decades, there have been improvements to women's economic and social well-being; there have been changes in both the attitudes and responses toward intimate violence; and, there have been fundamental changes to the type of intimate unions chosen by women and men.

Future research, then, attempting to identify contributing factors to the recent trends in spousal homicide in this country should occur in two stages. First, the role of various contributing factors identified in research conducted in the United States should be examined in the Canadian context. The second research stage would extend this work by addressing some of the limitations identified in the previous section. As a part of this research agenda, three issues need to be considered:

- The assumption that available domestic violence resources are, first, utilized and, second, uniformly accessible to various groups;
- That both successful and unsuccessful attempts are made by intimate partners to exit abusive relationships; and, related to this; and,
- That responses to both lethal and non lethal violence need to be perceived as *processes* rather than isolated, single incidents.

Below, these three issues are briefly discussed with respect to objectives for future research.

Linking the availability of resources to utilization and accessibility

One of the first studies to explore the impact of legal and extra-legal domestic violence resources on rates of lethal victimization demonstrated that various resources appeared to provide some protection for intimate partners but, more specifically, for male victims. In other words, as such resources became more available, the rate at which women killed male intimate partners decreased. While these findings should serve as an incentive for the continuation of services that provide non-lethal alternatives to women, it is curious that the very services implemented with the purpose of protecting women have not directly achieved this goal. One explanation that has been offered for this paradox, but not yet systematically assessed, is that the services available do not offer the type of relief that addresses high-risk situations for the lethal victimization of women by intimate male partners. Recall that the predominant motive behind the killing of women by male intimate partners is the actual or impending decision by the female to end the relationship. It may be that different resources or mechanisms need to be identified and implemented that allows women to make these decisions, and follow through on them, safely. According to Crawford et al. (1999):

> The systematic response to women at risk of lethal violence has been to focus on safety in terms of keeping her away from the potential killer, rather than focusing on comprehensive strategies that will contain and intervene with him to remove the risk to her without causing her to completely alter her way of living...A model of intervention that insists upon the pursuit of two simultaneous and mutually reinforcing strategies [is needed]: the containment of violent men who may kill their intimate partners, along with emergency safety planning strategies

with women at risk of being killed by partners. (p. 12)[70]

Another explanation for this paradox is that the existence of such services does not necessarily mean they are utilized and, furthermore, that all women use the services to the same degree. Browne & Williams (1989), the first to assess the impact of domestic violence services on female-perpetrated homicides, acknowledged their inability to directly link the non-perpetration of a female-perpetrated homicide and the presence of a non-violent alternative. They state:

> *Availability* of the alternative is of course a necessary condition and the *presence* of resources can have both tangible and symbolic importance. However, given availability, other conditions must be fulfilled for a particular resource to have a direct inhibitory effect: (1) *awareness* – the individual for whom the resource is intended must know of its availability; (2) *accessibility* – the resource must be practically accessible to the population for whom it is intended; (3) *mobilization* – the individuals must actually utilize the resource; (4) *responsiveness* – the resource must be responsive to those who attempt to utilize it; and (5) *effectiveness* – the response must be effective in meeting the needs of those who utilize it (Browne & Williams, 1989: 91-92).

As such, individual-level analyses must be conducted that are able to measure:

- Whether intimate partners who suffer abuse are aware of any domestic violence legislation that exists or whether they are aware of services that are available in their area;
- The way in which legal and extra-legal domestic violence resources are utilized and/or enforced;
- The type of response received from criminal justice actors, with respect to legal resources, or from individuals who offer support services, with respect to extra-legal resources, when abused women attempt to use them; and,
- The symbolic impact of legislative policies, educational programs, and other resources in fighting the problem of domestic violence.

Related to these issues, it is important to determine whether the effects of these services differ for various groups, depending on gender, age, race, type of intimate partner relationship, urban/rural location or region of the country. It may be that the above conditions – availability, presence, awareness, accessibility, mobilization, responsiveness and effectiveness – vary considerably, depending on the presence or absence of a number of characteristics or the location being examined.

However, directly linking knowledge of available services to non-perpetrated homicides will not necessarily support the conclusion that it was those resources that prevented the lethal outcomes. One way to do this is to compare the characteristics of and the processes surrounding successful and unsuccessful attempts in exiting abusive and potentially lethal relationships. This type of research design is discussed briefly below.

Comparing successful and unsuccessful attempts in exiting abusive relationships

Research in the United States has shown that the effects of exposure reduction on intimate partner homicide are mixed (Dugan et al., 1999; Dugan, 1999). One should not assume from this, however, that prevention strategies that reduce exposure to violence are ineffective. It does suggest, though, that more research is needed to better understand the circumstances surrounding successful attempts to reduce exposure to violence. One way to do this is by examining cases in which efforts to leave an abuser were not successful (a homicide occurred) and compare these to cases in which the individual was successful in leaving the abuser (no homicide occurred). In other words, researchers need to examine cases of intimate partner homicide and attempted intimate partner homicide in more detail so as to determine what leads to lethal and non-lethal outcomes.

An example of this is a multi-city, case-control study by Campbell and her colleagues (1998, 1999) in the United States.[71] Investigators in each city are (or have) gathering information on 250 cases of femicide from police homicide files as well as through a proxy for the

[70] For a comprehensive outline of recommendations for achieving such goals, see Crawford, Haskell & Bacon (1999).

[71] This study is an interdisciplinary effort that involves investigators from the disciplines of nursing, public health, criminology, and medicine. In each city, there is collaboration between law enforcement, the courts, universities, domestic violence shelters and bereavement centres.

victim (i.e., surviving mother, sister, or best friend). The characteristics of these cases are compared to 250 cases of attempted femicides and 250 controls (i.e., battered women) surveyed by a research firm. A comparison of these three sub-samples enables researchers to identify what factors may have contributed to or prevented a lethal outcome.

Conceptualizing intimate partner violence and intervention as a process not a single event

Finally, research on intimate partner violence has been limited somewhat by the tendency of researchers to focus on violent incidents and the accompanying interventions or outcomes as isolated events rather than processes.[72] For example, in the case of legal intervention, Lewis et al. (2000) have argued that examining the legal response from the perspective of the victim allows researchers to appreciate the importance of an intervention as a process rather than an event. More specifically:

> This approach enables us to identify which features of intervention can be experienced as positive, even if the overall intervention is ultimately negatively evaluated by women. Future evaluations should be attuned to the potential of both material and symbolic effects of interventions... What years of scholarship have made clear is the futility of considering interventions in isolation...We must be realistic about the potential of a single, brief, transient contact with the police and the court system to address ingrained behaviour which is supported by an accumulation of complex attitudes and beliefs...Rather, future research and policy deliberations should investigate how sets of interventions which mobilize legal structures, social welfare services and support of informal networks and communities, may dove-tail to constitute a concerted, effective community response to men's violence against women (Lewis et al., 2000: 202).

Based on the above, any examination of factors that contribute to declines in intimate partner homicide must consider various stages in the process. In other words, the deterrent effects of legal sanctions is only one form of intervention and, potentially, the least effective in cases of intimate partner violence. Similarly, shelters are not the only form of refuge available to victims of domestic violence. Family, friends, clergy, doctors and a variety of other informal networks are often used to successfully reduce exposure to threats within intimate relationships (see Kaukinen, 2001). Thus, understanding what works and what does not work requires an examination of a multitude of agencies and support networks that respond to intimate violence at various stages in the lives of abuse victims.

[72] For a more detailed discussion of this with respect to the law, see Lewis, Dobash, Dobash & Cavanagh (2000).

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Appendix A

Table 1: **Summary of studies that contribute to an understanding of the role played by various exposure reduction factors in lethal violence between intimate partners**

Source	Unit of Analysis	N	Period	Focus	Dependent Variable	Significant Findings
Avakame (1999)	States, incident-based analysis	26,799	1990 - 1994	Disagg. by Race	Female Homicide Rates	▪ High sex ratios (+), White women ▪ Female labor force (+), White women ▪ Percent poverty (+), White women
Bailey & Peterson (1995)	Cities	138	1980	Disagg. by type of Relation	Total Female Victimization Homicide Rates	*Absolute Terms* ▪ Percentage Black (+) ▪ Divorce rate (+) ▪ General income inequality (+) ▪ White/Black income inequality (+) ▪ Percent females separated (+); income levels ▪ Percent females married (+); felony murder only
						Relative Terms ▪ Percent Black (+) ▪ Divorce rate (+) ▪ General income inequality (+) ▪ White/Black income inequality (+)
					Wife Homicide Rates	*Relative Terms* ▪ Percent Black (+) ▪ Percent family poverty (+) ▪ Percent females separated (-) ▪ Cap in college levels (+) ▪ Cap in unemployment levels (+)
					Female Acquaintance Homicide Rates	▪ Percent Black (+) ▪ Divorce rate (+), college income – cap in income levels (+) ▪ Cap in occupational levels (+)
					Female Argument-Related Homicide Rates	▪ Percent Black (+) ▪ Divorce rate (+) ▪ General income inequality (+) ▪ White/Black income inequality (-), occupation and income ▪ Percent females married (+), occupational and unemployment ▪ Cap in income levels (+)

Source	Unit of Analysis	N	Period	Focus	Dependent Variable	Significant Findings
Brewer & Smith (1995)	Cities	177	1980	Disagg. by Sex	Female Homicide Rates	• Population size (+) • Percentage divorced (+) • Percentage aged 15-29 (-)
					Male Homicide Rates	• Population size (+) • Percentage divorced (+) • Percentage aged 15-29 (-)
Browne & Williams (1989)	States	50	1980-1984	Disagg. by Sex	Female-Perpetrated Homicide Rates	• Resources for Abused Women (-) • Male-Perpetrated Homicide (+) • Percent Urban (-) • Population mobility (+)
Dugan, Nagin & Rosenfeld (1999)	Cities	25	1976-1992	Disagg. by Sex, Race, Marital Status	Male/Female Intimate Partner Homicide Rates	• Hotlines (-); married males • Legal advocacy (-); married males • Counseling (+); married males & unmarried females • Marriage rate (+); married females & married males, (-) unmarried females • Divorce rate (-) married males & (+) unmarried females • Women's relative education (-); unmarried males • Percent Black (+) married males, (-) unmarried females • Adult rate (+), unmarried females
Gartner (1990)	Nation & Time period	18/7	1950-1980	Disagg. by Sex/Age	Male/Female Homicide Rates	• Material deprivation (+) • Weak social integration (+) • Expose official violence (+) • Divorce rate (+) • Labour force participate (+), females only
Gartner, Baker & Pampel (1990)	Countries	18/7	1950-1985	Disagg. by Sex	Gender-Specific Homicide Rates	• Less traditional roles adopted by women (+), where female status is lower
Gartner & McCarthy (1991)	Individual-level	670	1921-1988	Disagg. by Intimate/ Non-int.	General Femicide Rates	• Single (-); early period • Married (+); early period • Employment (+); early period

Source	Unit of Analysis	N	Period	Focus	Dependent Variable	Significant Findings
					Spousal Femicide Rates	• Women 35-49 (+); later period • Women over 50 (-); entire period • Employment (+); early period
					Non-Intimate Femicide Rates	• Younger victims (+); Single (+); Married (-); Employment (+); early period
Gauthier & Bankston (1997)	Cities	191	1990	Disagg. by Cities, Economic Status & Location	Sex Ratio of Intimate Partner Killings (SROIK)	• Relative employment (-); high SES cities, southern cities • Residential density (+); high SES, southern cities • Percent Black (+); high SES, non-southern cities • Percent female below poverty (+); high SES cities • Mean pub. assistance (-); high/low, non-southern cities • Percent Hispanic (-); southern • Mean per capita income (-); non-southern cities
Whaley & Messner (2000)	Cities	109	1980-1990	Disagg. by Inter or Intrasexual	Inter & Intra-Sexual Homicide Rates	• Gender equality (+); except for female-female killings • Sex-specific economic disadvantage (+), all types • Population size (+); female-male & male-male killings • Percent divorced (+); except for female-female killings • Southern region (+); all except for female-female killings